20 Teaching with video

A Using video in language learning

The use of videotapes has been a common feature in language teaching for many years. It is rare, these days, for a publisher to produce a major coursebook without a video component added in, and teachers frequently enliven their classes with off-air material or tapes produced for language learning.

A1 Why use video?

To some people videotape is merely a glorified version of audiotape, and the use of video in class is just listening 'with pictures'. But there are many reasons why video can add a special, extra dimension to the learning experience:

- **Seeing language-in-use:** one of the main advantages of video is that students do not just hear language, they see it too. This greatly aids comprehension, since for example, general meaning and moods are often conveyed through expression, gesture (see Chapter 2, E2), and other visual clues. Thus we can observe how intonation can match facial expression. All such paralinguistic features give valuable meaning clues and help viewers to see beyond what they are listening to, and thus interpret the text more deeply (see Chapter 14, A4).

- **Cross-cultural awareness:** video uniquely allows students a look at situations far beyond their classrooms. This is especially useful if they want to see, for example, typical British 'body language' when inviting someone out, or how Americans speak to waiters. Video is also of great value in giving students a chance to see such things as what kinds of food people eat in other countries, and what they wear.

- **The power of creation:** when students use video cameras themselves they are given the potential to create something memorable and enjoyable. The camera operators and directors suddenly have considerable power. The task of video-making can provoke genuinely creative and communicative uses of the language, with students finding themselves 'doing new things in English' (Cooper et al. 1991: 6).

- **Motivation:** for all of the reasons so far mentioned, most students show an increased level of interest when they have a chance to see language in use as well as hear it, and when this is coupled with interesting tasks.

A2 Video problems

If we wish to use video successfully in classes we need to be aware of a number of potential problems:

- **The 'nothing new' syndrome:** just switching on the monitor in a classroom is not especially exciting for a television (and Internet) viewing population. Both in our choice of video material and in the way we exploit it, we have to provide video activities that are unique learning experiences and do not just replicate home television viewing.
- **Poor quality tapes and disks:** poorly filmed and woodenly acted material will not engage students who are used to something better. When deciding whether to use a videotape or disk, we have to judge whether the quality is sufficiently good to attract our students' interest.
- **Poor viewing conditions:** we have to be sure that students can see and hear the video. The monitor must big enough for the people at the back of the class to see the screen clearly. We also need to see if we can dim the ambient light sufficiently for the picture to be clear.
- **Stop and start:** some students become frustrated when teachers constantly stop and start the video, only showing little bits at a time. It can also be extremely irritating if a teacher fails to show the class how the 'story' ends. Sometimes this is done on purpose – as a spur to creativity or prediction – but at other times some teachers fail to take students' natural curiosity into account.

  There is no hard and fast rule about this. We need to ask ourselves how many stops and starts we ourselves could cope with, and how much we would want to see the end of a sequence. The answers will guide the way we use video with others.
- **The length of extracts:** some people think that more than two or three minutes of video sends students to sleep. Others, however, like to show students whole programmes.

  Short video sequences of between one and four minutes can yield a number of exercises, demonstrate a satisfying range of language, are easier to manipulate, and can be highly motivating. Such short extracts are usually the best option; where we want to use longer ones – because of the topic, or because it is impossible to extract a good short extract – we will need to design activities to keep our students involved.
- **Fingers and thumbs:** students can be irritated by teachers who cannot find what they want or get back to where they have just been on the tape or disk. Teachers themselves become frustrated when the machine does not work the way they want it to. The only answer is for us to familiarise ourselves with the system we're using.

A3 Video types

There are three basic types of video which can readily be used in class: 'off-air' programmes, 'real-world' videos, and language learning videos.

- **Off-air programmes:** programmes recorded from a television channel should be engaging for our students, and of a sensible length. We have to consider their comprehensibility too. Apart from overall language level, some off-air video is also extremely difficult for students to understand, especially where particularly marked accents are used or where there is a high preponderance of slang or regional vernacular. The best programmes and excerpts are ones which we can use for a range of activities including prediction, cross-cultural awareness, teaching language, or as spurs for the students' own creativity.

  All television programmes have copyright restrictions which vary from country to country. It is important to know what that law is and realise that breaking it can have serious consequences.

- **Real-world video:** there is no reason why we and our students should not use separately published videotape material such as feature films, exercise 'manuals', wildlife documentaries or comedy provided that there are no copyright restrictions for doing this. Once again we need to make our choice based on how engaging and comprehensible the extract is likely to be, and whether it has multi-use potential. We need to judge the length of the extract in the same way too.

- **Language learning videos:** many publishers now produce free-standing language learning videos – or videos to accompany coursebooks. Frequently these have accompanying workbooks.

  The main advantage of specially made videos is that they have been designed with students at a particular level in mind. They are thus likely to be comprehensible, designed to appeal to students' topic interests, and multi-use since they can not only be used for language study, but also for a number of other activities as well.

  The danger of language learning videos, however, is that they fail the quality test either because the production is poor, the situations and the language are inauthentic, or the content is too unsophisticated. Our choice, therefore, has to be limited to those sequences which our students will accept and enjoy.

A4 Whole-lesson video

Where there are no copyright restrictions, teachers can record programmes off-air and base a whole-class sequence around them. For example, suppose that with an intermediate class we wish to show all or part of a thirty-minute documentary about young boys being sent to private boarding schools in Britain. We might start the sequence with a discussion about which of the following types of school students would prefer to go to/send their children to and why:

	Single sex	Co-educational
Privately owned		
State run		

We might then check our students' knowledge of certain key vocabulary, before giving them a prediction exercise based on what they are going to see. They then watch and listen for gist, and having checked that they have a general understanding of what they have seen, we can then ask them whether the programme has changed the views that they expressed in the initial discussion (above).

Students now watch excerpts from the video again to check on detailed aspects of the video sequence such as how a particular seven-year-old felt about being sent away from home, what his mother's reaction was, and what the head teacher of the school said about the system's advantages.

Before leaving the watching of the video, we can rewind and pick out particular uses of language, which we can ensure students understand and know how to use.

We can follow up this viewing with a number of possible activities: writing a review of the programme, role-playing an interview with the school's head teacher, a parent, or one of the children, discussing the pros and cons of sending children away to school, or writing letters to the programme makers.

This sequence shows a way of exploiting a documentary strand – whether about private schooling, slum living, medical progress, the environment or recent developments in pop music. The video programme has become the main text for a topic-focused lesson.

A5 Video as part of a lesson

We can use a short video extract as one component in a longer lesson sequence, whether to illustrate the topic we are working on, to highlight language points, or to settle a class after a noisy activity.

- **Topic:** we will often be able to introduce a short two- or three-minute video extract into a lesson devoted to a particular topic. If students are working on a reading text about genetically modified food and animals, for example, we might show a quick interview clip with a government minister, or a quick burst of a news bulletin about campaigners against genetic modification.

- **Language:** when a class is working on an area of language, whether grammatical, functional, or lexical – or a mixture of all three – the lesson can be greatly enhanced by a video extract which shows that language in operation.

  Video extracts can be used to introduce new language, practise already known items, or analyse the language used in certain typical exchanges and genres (see Chapter 14, B2).

- **Relaxation:** video can occasionally be used for relaxation, but this use must not be overdone since, as we have said, we usually need to make it an active process. But we might show/play a music video at the end of a long lesson or show a quick bit of video film about a place or a person as a bridge between, for example, a noisy activity and a quiet one.

A6 Self-access video

Students do not have to watch videos only in the classroom. They can also watch them at home, or in their school's self-access centres (see Chapter 24, A2). These will be especially useful where there are worksheets and related material for them to work with, and where teachers are on hand to offer guidance since both may encourage students to make the most of self-access viewing rather than just whiling away the time in non-focused watching.

Many modern language laboratories (see Chapter 10E) have video stations too, where students can watch and interact with specially designed sequences on film or disk.

B Common video teaching techniques

There are a number of teaching techniques which can be used in video-based lessons.

B1 Viewing techniques

All of the following viewing techniques are designed to awaken the students' curiosity, through prediction activities (see Chapter 14, A4), so that when they finally watch the video sequence in its entirety they will have some expectations about it.

- **Fast forward:** the teacher presses the 'play' button and then fast forwards the video so that the sequence shoots pass silently and at great speed, taking only a few seconds. When it is over the teacher can ask students what the extract was all about and whether they can guess what the characters are saying.

- **Silent viewing (for language):** the teacher plays the tape at normal speed, but without the sound. Students have to guess what the characters are saying. When they have done this, the teacher plays the tape with sound so that they can check to see if they guessed correctly.

- **Silent viewing (for music):** the same technique can be used with music. Teachers show a sequence without sound and ask students to say what kind of music they would put behind it and why. When the sequence is then shown again, with sound, students can judge whether they chose the same mood as the director/composer.

- **Freeze frame:** at any stage during a video sequence we can 'freeze' the picture, stopping the participants dead in their tracks. This is extremely useful for asking the students what they think will happen next or what the character will say next.

- **Partial viewing:** one way of provoking the students' curiosity is to allow them only a partial view of the pictures on the screen. We can use pieces of card to cover most of the screen, only leaving the edges on view; we can put little squares of paper all over the screen and remove them one-by-one so that what is happening is only gradually revealed.

A variation of partial viewing occurs when the teacher uses a large 'divider', placed at right angles to the screen so that half the class can only see one half of the screen, whilst the rest of the class can see the other half. They then have to say what they think the people on the other side saw.

B2 Listening (and mixed) techniques

Listening routines, based on the same principles as those for viewing, are similarly designed to provoke engagement and expectations.

- **Pictureless listening (language):** the teacher covers the screen, turns the monitor away from the students, or turns the brightness control right down. The students then listen to a dialogue and have to guess such things as where it is taking place and who the speakers are. Can they guess their age, for example? What do they think the speakers actually look like?
- **Pictureless listening (music):** where an excerpt has a prominent music track, students can listen to it and then say – based on the mood it appears to convey – what kind of scene they think it accompanies and where it is taking place.
- **Pictureless listening (sound effects):** in a scene without dialogue students can listen to the sounds to guess the scene. For example, they might hear the lighting of a gas stove, eggs being broken and fried, coffee being poured and the milk and sugar stirred in. They then tell 'the story' they think they have just heard.
- **Picture or speech:** we can divide the class in two so that half of the class faces the screen, and half faces away. The students who can see the screen have to describe what is happening to the students who cannot. This forces them into immediate fluency while the non-watching students struggle to understand what is going on, and is an effective way of mixing reception and production in spoken English (see Chapter 17, B1). Halfway through an excerpt the students can change round.

C Video watching activities

In this section we will look at a number of activities designed for specific video situations. They explore the range of options for use with both 'off-air' and language learning videos. The specific comprehension skills that each activity seeks to develop are specified; many of these are similar to the skills required in listening to purely audio materials (see Chapter 14, A4).

C1 General comprehension

The following activity is designed to have students watch a video in order to understand the gist of it, and then look back again for details.

Example 1: Witness statement	Activity: being observant Skills: watching, listening for detail Age: any Level: elementary and above

In this activity the students have to try and give as much information as they can about what they have seen – as if they were witnesses being questioned by the police. The best kind of video extract for this is a short one- or two-minute conversation in an interesting location.

After being told to remember as much as they can, they watch the sequence. In pairs they now have to agree on everything they heard and saw: *Who said what to who? Where did the action take place? Who was wearing what? How many people were there in the scene? What was the name of the shop? How many windows were there in the house? Was there anything in the distance? What exactly did the characters say (if anything)?*

When the pairs have finished their discussion the teacher reads out questions and the students have to write their answers. The questions might be something like the following:

1 How many people did you see in total in the excerpt?
2 How many of them were women? How many were men?
3 What did the man say first?
4 Were there any vehicles in the picture? If so what were they?
5 How many different buildings were there?
6 What colour was the old man's jacket?
etc.

When students have written the answers, they compare them with other pairs to see whether they all agree. Now they watch the excerpt again to see how good they are as witnesses.

Other general comprehension tasks include watching to confirm expectations, similar to reading and listening tasks of the same type, and using a genre analyser to scrutinise advertisements (see Example 2 in Chapter 18c).

C2 Working with aspects of language

The activity in this section shows language work unique to the medium of video.

Example 2: Subtitles	Activity: comparing languages Skills: watching for gist, watching for detailed comprehension, translation Age: adult Level: intermediate and above

A way of getting students in monolingual groups to focus on language is to get hold of English language films which have subtitles in the students' language. The way in which dialogue is subtitled can sometimes seem strange or funny, but even where this is true, the subtitler has tried to capture the meaning which the speakers wished to convey in the best way they can.

The teacher can start by discussing film subtitles in general. How accurate are they? Why do they sometimes miss out bits of dialogue – especially where there are many speakers talking rapidly? She now tells them that they are going to watch an extract with no sound, but that they will be able to read the subtitles. For the first viewing they should just concentrate on the 'story'.

After the first viewing the teacher and students discuss what they have seen. She then tells them that they are going to watch again, also without sound, but that this time she will stop the video every time a subtitle comes up. The students will then have to do their best to write down what they think the original English words were. When they have done this they can compare their attempts with a colleague. For the final viewing they watch the extract with the sound turned up, to compare their English with the words that were actually spoken.

C3 Video as a springboard to creativity

The activity in this section shows how a video excerpt can be used to spark students' creativity by encouraging interpretation, provoking thought, and asking for language use.

Example 3: Different season, different sex

Activity: making changes
Skills: watching for gist, interpreting text
Age: young adult and above
Level: lower intermediate and above

In this activity students watch a video excerpt and the teacher makes sure that they understand it. They do any language work which may be appropriate.

The teacher now asks the students to watch the excerpt again. But this time they have to imagine how the scene would be different if, for example, instead of the summer which is clearly shown, the episode were taking place in an icy winter. Or, if the excerpt takes place in rain, how would it be different in bright sunshine? They can discuss the differences in pairs or groups, talking about everything from what the characters might wear to how they might speak, how they might behave.

An interesting variation on this is to ask students how the scene would be different if the participants were the opposite sex. Would the conversation between two women be different if the women were changed into men? How might the invitation dialogue they have just watched change if the sex of the participants were reversed? The responses to these questions are often revealing (and amusing). What students say will depend a lot upon their age and culture, of course, and there is always the danger of unnecessary sexism. But where teachers handle the activity with finesse and skill, the exercise can be very successful.

Having students think about video excerpts in this way not only helps them understand more about the language being used (and how it might change), but also directs them to insights about language and behaviour in general.

We can also get students to write captions (similar to the captions in early films) for videos which we play without sound.

D Video-making activities

The activities in this section suggest ways in which the camera can become a central learning aid, as a result of which students work cooperatively together using a wide variety of language both in the process and the product of video-making. Where sophisticated editing facilities are available, and there are trained video personnel on the premises, high production values can be achieved. But that is not the main point of these activities, since a lot can be achieved with just a hand-held camera and a playback monitor.

D1 Video simulations

Video can enhance simulations, not only because it can provide very telling feedback when students can watch themselves and evaluate their performance, but also because the presence of a video camera helps to make media simulations (such as TV programmes) more realistic.

Example 4: News bulletin

Activity: presenting information clearly
Age: young adult and above
Level: elementary and above

News bulletins are especially interesting for students of English not only because they will want to be able to understand the news in English, but also because news broadcasts have special formats and use recognisable language patterns. Recognition of such formats allows teachers to ask students to put their own bulletins together, based on the news from today's papers, or on stories which they have been studying. How would television news present the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, the Spanish conquest of Mexico, or the demise of Captain Ahab in his pursuit of the great white whale?

Students can first watch news bulletins and analyse the language that is particular to this genre (for example, passive usage, the use of present tenses to tell stories, and the way in which speech is reported). In small groups they then choose the stories they wish to tell and the order in which they wish to tell them. After writing the script – and editing it with the help of the teacher – they film their broadcasts; these are then watched by their classmates, and by the teacher who can lead the feedback session which ensues.

We can also have students record their own political broadcasts or advertisements.

D2 Creative ideas

The following activity expects the students to use their imagination and creativity to bring a fresh dimension to their learning.

Example 5: Put it on screen	Focus:	acting from a script, interpreting text
	Age:	any
	Level:	any

When students read a story, study an extract from a novel, or work with a coursebook dialogue, they form some kind of mental picture of what they are understanding. This ranges from a perception of the setting to an idea of what characters look and sound like.

A way of really 'getting inside the text' is to have students film the episode they have just read. If they are studying a textbook dialogue, for example, we might tell them that they should disregard the textbook illustration, and take the words and situation only. With these in mind they should plan and film their own versions of the text. On the other hand, we might encourage them to change aspects of the dialogue – the ending perhaps – that they do not like, so that even a textbook dialogue becomes their own.

Any text which involves human interaction can be exploited in this way. Would it be possible to film Robert O'Connor's first nerve-wracking class in the prison (see Example 1, Chapter 15, B1)?

Filming an episode involves discussion about acting and direction and a close focus on the text in question. However, despite possible problems of logistics and time, the results can be extremely satisfying, and the activity itself highly motivating.

D3 Working with language

We can ask students to make videos with a focus on particular language points.

Example 6: The grammar lecture	Focus:	language description
	Age:	young adult and above
	Level:	intermediate and above

For more advanced students the teacher can set a 'grammar lecture' task where the group makes their own grammar teaching video for their classmates or for students at lower levels.

Students select, or are given, a particular grammar topic. The teacher can give them ideas about sources of information for their research (see Chapter 12B and C). In groups they then do their research and then discuss how to explain the grammar to a different group of learners. They have to do this in the form of a filmed lecture, with acted out examples. More than one person should take part, giving examples or taking over the next point in the explanation, but the object is for a short video sequence to give the essential information about a language point.

Provided that we do not expect a superb finished product, this kind of grammar exploration, and the attempt to put such concepts into words, really does focus the students' attention on features of the language. It is not for the faint-hearted, however, since it demands time, patience, and doggedness. The focus does not have to be grammar of course; lectures can also concentrate on lexical areas, features of pronunciation, or ways of performing language functions.

Students can also conduct interviews with competent speakers and use what they say for language analysis. 'Vox pop' interviews (where members of the public are asked their opinions on a certain issue) are ideal for this.

D4 Getting everyone involved

Because filming usually involves one camera operator, and may be confined to one narrator and one overall director, there is a danger that some students may get left out of the video-making process. However, there are ways of avoiding this danger:

- **The group:** if more than one video camera is available we can divide a class into groups.That way each member of each group has a function.
- **Process:** we can ensure participation in the decision-making process by insisting that no roles (such as actor, camera operator, director) are chosen until the last moment.
- **Assigning roles:** we can assign a number of different roles as in a real film crew. This includes such jobs as clapperboard operators, script consultants, lighting and costumes.

D5 What to do with the videos

One of the main benefits of video-making for students is the chance to display what they have done and get feedback on it from classmates and teachers. This can be achieved in a number of ways:

- **Class feedback:** when students show their videos to the rest of the class, there are a number of ways in which those classmates can react. They can vote for the best video, or they can record the successful and less successful examples of what they hear and see (see Chapter 7, C3). This will be greatly enhanced if different students take charge of different areas such as effectiveness, clarity, grammar, vocabulary, production, and voice quality.
- **Teacher feedback:** one of the ways in which we can be sure that video-making is a learning process is by responding to the students' work with the same care that we give to written work (see Chapter 7D). This means responding to each video, saying either face-to-face or in writing what we liked about it, correcting mistakes, where appropriate, and making suggestions about how it might be improved.
- **Video installation:** we can organise a video day in which all of our students' videos are shown in an exhibition. If possible, we will have more than one machine running so that visitors to our exhibition can see all the videos that have been made while walking around. With the appropriate technological resources we can also put the video clips on to a student web site.

- **Individual and library copies:** if we have copying facilities we can make copies of our students' work. These can then be deposited in the school's video library or given to each student as a memento.

D6 Video and the teacher

We cannot leave the topic of video without mentioning the invaluable contribution that it can make to teacher development (see Chapter 24B). Having someone film you when you are teaching can be a challenging experience, but it can be extremely valuable.

Most teachers have an idea of how they appear as teachers – and about how effective certain mannerisms and techniques can be. Most of us have favourite activities, and cultivate particular classroom personae. We judge the success of what we do not only on the students' gradual acquisition of the language, but also on their minute-by-minute reactions to how we behave in class, and on the perceptions this gives us of how well and appropriately we are teaching. Watching a film of a lesson we have taught, however, may give us different perceptions altogether, since it offers us the opportunity to see our teaching as others see it.

Many teachers are alarmed at seeing themselves on video, just as many people dislike their voices on audiotape. It is very easy to perceive one's own faults in such a situation: favourite catchphrases sound hackneyed and repetitive; rapport seems over-strained or over-intimate, and the voice is too dramatic or too boring. But viewers should treat themselves charitably. The point of watching ourselves teach is not to engage in an orgy of self-criticism, but to evaluate our actions in terms of their effectiveness. Which bits of the lesson clearly work? How could we change the way we do this exercise so that next time it is more engaging, less confusing, more efficient?

One major caveat about classroom videoing is that the camera does not actually tell the truth. If the lens is focused on the teacher it automatically makes them the main player in the scene even if what they are actually doing is just listening to students. This is why it is a good idea for the camera to be pointed as much at the students as at the teacher. This means that the teacher can see the effect of what she does. Nor can a vision and sound medium entirely capture the atmosphere of a lesson. The classroom on the video screen is only a partial version of the real thing.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Video and motivation**

  See S Stempleski and B Tomalin (1990: 3).

- **Video activities**

  A range of excellent video activities can be found in S Stempleski and B Tomalin (1990), R Cooper et al. (1991), and M Allen (1986).

- **Subtitles**

  For the use of teletext subtitles, see R Vanderplank (1988 and 1996).

- **Videoing teachers**

  See J Laycock and P Bunnag (1991) and R Cooper (1993).

- **Copyright**

  Copyright regulations vary from country to country, and depending on the type of video involved. Under US law, fair use of videos includes education provided that off-air videos are not used for profit, and provided that they are not kept beyond a certain time. The same kind of law operates in the UK, though at the time of writing the European Union may be bringing in draconian new laws to prohibit this. Commercially produced videos have their own restrictions; teachers should carefully check the copyright notices that come with them. There are restrictions, too, on the copying of most specially made educational videos.

  For more on copyright issues, see A Williams et al. (1999). University law faculties have sites which can be searched for copyright law, and for the USA it might be worth looking at 'multimedia law' at http://www.oikoumene.com/.

21 Syllabuses and coursebooks

Writers and course designers have to take a number of issues into account when designing their materials. Once they have a clear idea of how their theories and beliefs about learning can be translated into appropriate activities they will have to think about what topics to include. This will be based on perceptions of what students find engaging, what research shows in this area, and on the potential for interesting exploitation of the topics they might select. It will also be necessary to consider what kind of culture the material should reflect or encourage, and to ensure some kind of appropriate balance in terms of gender and the representation of different groups in society, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic.

Writers and course designers also have to decide what language variety or varieties they wish to focus on or have represented (see Chapter 1B), and they need to adopt a position on how authentic the language should be, especially at beginner levels (see Chapter 14, B1).

Once these decisions have been taken, coursebook writers (and language program designers in general) can then turn their attention to the central organising strand of their materials, namely the syllabus.

A Syllabus design

Syllabus design concerns the selection of items to be learnt and the grading of those items into an appropriate sequence. It is different from curriculum design (Nunan 1988a: Chapter 1). In the latter, the designer is concerned not just with lists of what will be taught and in what order, but also with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management and administration of education programmes.

There are now a number of different types of language syllabus (see A2 below), all of which might be taken as a starting point in the planning of a new coursebook, or of a term's, or year's work. But, whatever type it is, every syllabus needs to be developed on the basis of certain criteria, such as 'learnability' and 'frequency', which can inform decisions about selection and ordering, as described below.

A1 Syllabus design criteria

When designers put syllabuses together they have to consider each item for inclusion on the basis of a number of criteria. This will not only help them to decide if they want to include the item in question, but also where to put it in the sequence. However, these different design criteria point, in many cases, to different conclusions. The syllabus designer has to balance such competing claims when making decisions about selection and grading.

- **Learnability:** some structural or lexical items are easier for students to learn than others. Thus we teach easier things first and then increase the level of difficulty as the students' language level rises. Learnability might tell us that, at beginner levels, it is easier to teach uses of *was* and *were* immediately after teaching uses of *is* and *are*, rather than follow *is* and *are* with the third conditional. Learnability might persuade us to teach *some* and *any* on their own rather than introduce a whole range of quantifiers (*much, many, few,* etc.) all at the same time.

- **Frequency:** it would make sense, especially at beginning levels, to include items which are more frequent in the language, than ones that are only used occasionally by native speakers. Now that corpus information can give us accurate frequency counts (see Chapter 2, B1), we are in a position to say with some authority, for example, that *see* is used more often to mean *understand* (e.g. *Oh, I see*) than it is to denote vision. It might make sense, therefore, to teach that meaning of *see* first – but that decision will also have to depend upon the other design criteria listed here, which might lead us to a different conclusion.

- **Coverage:** some words and structures have greater coverage (scope for use) than others. Thus we might decide, on the basis of coverage, to introduce the *going to* future before the present continuous with future reference, if we could show that *going to* could be used in more situations than the present continuous.

- **Usefulness:** the reason that words like *book* and *pen* figure so highly in classrooms (even though they might not be that frequent in real language use) is because they are useful words in that situation. In the same way, words for family members occur early on in a student's learning life because they are useful in the context of what students are linguistically able to talk about.

A2 Different syllabuses

- **The grammar syllabus:** this is the commonest type of syllabus, both traditionally and currently. A list of items is sequenced in such a way that the students gradually acquire a knowledge of grammatical structures, leading to an understanding of the grammatical system. Even in multi-syllabuses (see A3 below), it is the grammar syllabus which tends to be the main organising foundation, with units devoted to the verb *to be*, the present simple, the present continuous, countable and uncountable nouns, the present perfect, etc.

  Although grammar syllabuses have been used with success over a long period of time, many methodologists have come to see grammar as the wrong organising principle for a syllabus and have proposed a number of alternatives as frameworks to hang a language programme on (as we shall see below).

- **The lexical syllabus:** it is possible to organise a syllabus on the basis of vocabulary and lexis to create a lexical syllabus (see Chapter 6, A8).

  Applying syllabus design criteria to a lexical syllabus can be complex since there are so many facets to lexis, such as:

  - the vocabulary related to topics (e.g. art, clothes, crime)
  - issues of word formation (e.g. suffixes and other morphological changes)
  - word-grammar triggers (e.g. verbs which are followed by certain syntactic patterns)
  - compound lexical items (e.g. *walking-stick, multi-storey car park*)
  - connecting and linking words (e.g. *when, if, he/she*)
  - semi-fixed expressions (e.g. *Would you like to … ?, If I were you I'd …*)
  - connotation and the use of metaphor (see Chapter 2, B3)

  Another problem with lexical syllabuses is the relationship between lexis and grammar. Should phrasal verbs be taught as simple multi-word lexical items as they occur, or as a grammatical class? At what stage is the study of word formation appropriate, and when will it be useful to include fixed and semi-fixed expressions? What grammar should be included with new words, and how should that be selected and graded?

  Though syllabus designers may have little difficulty in applying design criteria to individual words, melding all the other concerns of lexis into a coherent order to make a truly lexical syllabus has not yet been shown to be feasible. A lexical syllabus produced by John Sinclair and Antoinette Renouf was 'several hundred pages long' (Sinclair and Renouf 1988: 156). Nevertheless, lexis in all its many forms does appear in wider syllabus plans (see A3 below).

- **The functional syllabus:** in his book *Notional Syllabuses* David Wilkins (1976) included categories of 'communicative function' (see Chapter 2, C1). These language functions are events which 'do things' such as *inviting, promising,* and *offering,* so that a functional syllabus might look like this:

  1 Requesting
  2 Offering
  3 Inviting
  4 Agreeing and disagreeing etc.

  The syllabus designer then chooses exponents for (ways of expressing) each function. For example, for *offering* she could choose from the following:

  Would you like me to … ?
  Do you want some help?
  I'll help if you want.
  Let me give you a hand.
  Here, let me.
  I'll do that … , etc.

But the syllabus designer can then run into problems of lexical and structural grading. If a syllabus is designed on the basis of the functions which students are most likely to have to perform (their 'usefulness'), the designer still needs to choose and order the exponents for each of those functions on the basis of 'learnability', 'coverage', and 'frequency' and may have trouble matching the functions with these criteria. It is possible to end up, too, with a series of phrases rather than a coherent system.

The modern consensus seems to be that functions may not be the best sole organising units for a syllabus, but that the teaching and learning of functions is an important part of a wider syllabus (see below).

- **The situational syllabus:** a situational syllabus offers the possibility of selecting and sequencing different real-life situations rather than different grammatical items, vocabulary topics, or functions. A situational syllabus might look something like this:

  1 At the bank
  2 At the supermarket
  3 At the travel agent
  4 At the restaurant
  etc.

  Where students have specific communicative needs (see Chapter 1, B3), organising teaching material by the situations which students will need to operate in is attractive, since the syllabus designer will be able to define the situation, the likely participants, and communicative goals with some certainty. Material for business or tourism students, for example, can profitably be organised in this way. But situational syllabuses are less appropriate for students of general English largely because it is difficult to guarantee that language for one specific situation will necessarily be useful in another. Furthermore, choosing which situations are 'key' situations for a general class is problematic since it depends on who the students are (they are never all the same) and where they are learning. It is for these reasons that situations are rarely taken as the main organising principle in general syllabus design.

- **The topic-based syllabus:** another framework around which to organise language is that of different topics, e.g. *the weather, sport, survival, literature, music*, and so on. This list can then be refined, so that the weather topic is subdivided into items such as the way weather changes, weather forecasting, weather and mood, and the damage that weather can cause.

  Topics provide a welcome organising principle in that they can be based on what students will be interested in. It may also be possible to identify what topics are most relevant to students' communicative needs (their usefulness) – though this may differ from what they want. Yet marrying topics to the concepts of learnability, frequency, and coverage is once again problematic since they will still have to be subdivided into the language and lexis which they generate.

Providing students with a sequence of topics which are relevant and engaging is an important part of a syllabus designer or coursebook writer's skill. But on its own such organisation is unlikely to be sufficient for syllabus organisation.

- **The task-based syllabus:** a task-based syllabus (see Chapter 6, A5) lists a series of tasks, and may later list some or all of the language to be used in those tasks. N S Prabhu, whose experiments in Bangalore, India did so much to advance the cause of task-based learning, organised a programme in just such a way, calling it a 'procedural syllabus' (Prabhu 1987). The only piece of 'deliberate language grading' occurred when teachers set oral before written tasks (Prabhu 1987: 26). Otherwise it was a question of putting one task before or after another.

  Prabhu's tasks are related to topics, as in this example:

  1 Clockface
    a Telling the time from a clockface; positioning the hands of a clock to show a given time.
    b Calculating durations from the movement of a clock's hands; working out intervals between given times.
    c Stating the time on a twelve hour clock and a twenty-four hour clock; relating times to phases of the day and night.

  From N S Prabhu (1987: 138)

  Jane Willis lists six task types that can be used with almost any topics. These are: listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experience, and creative tasks (Willis 1996: 26–27 and 149–154).

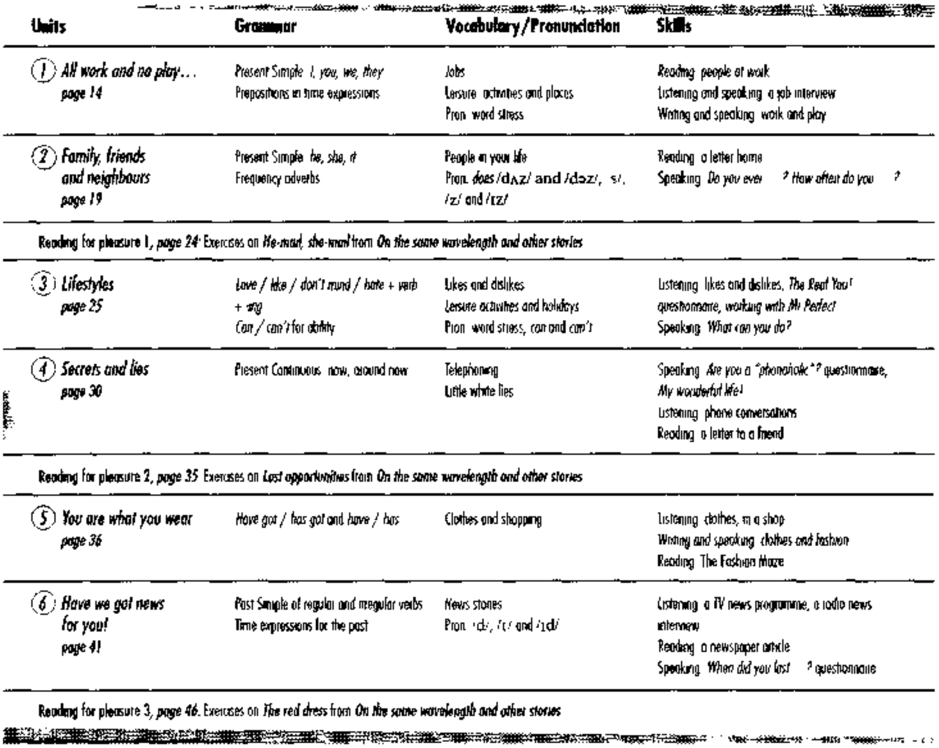
  As with situations and topics, it is difficult to know how to grade tasks in terms of difficulty. Prabhu does suggest sequences of lessons where the same topic information is used in more than one lesson and where the tasks to go with that information become more complex with each subsequent lesson, but there is little to say how such complexity is measured. The focus is, in David Nunan's words, on 'learning process' rather than 'learning product', and there is 'little or no attempt to relate these processes to outcomes' (Nunan 1988a: 44). A variety of factors interact to determine the difficulty of a task, but as yet, no one has worked out a satisfactory system with which to combine them into any kind of decent measure of difficulty.

  A task-based syllabus may well satisfy the desire to provide meaning-based learning but until there is a way of deciding which tasks should go where, such a syllabus remains tantalisingly 'ad hoc', and fails to command sufficiently widespread support amongst teachers and methodologists for it to become universally accepted.

A3 The multi-syllabus syllabus

A common solution to the competing claims of the different syllabus types we have looked at is the 'multi-syllabus'. Instead of a program based exclusively on grammatical or lexical categories, for example, the syllabus now shows any combination of items from grammar, lexis, language functions, situations, topics, tasks, different language skill tasks or pronunciation issues.

Where coursebook writers are not following a syllabus laid down by an education ministry, educational institution, or examination board, this is the approach that is most often followed. As the following example shows, authors often present their multi-syllabus in a 'map of the book':



Units	**Grammar**	**Vocabulary/Pronunciation**	**Skills**
① *All work and no play…* *page 14*	Present Simple *I, you, we, they* Prepositions in time expressions	Jobs Leisure activities and places Pron word stress	*Reading* people at work Listening and speaking a job interview Writing and speaking work and play
② *Family, friends and neighbours* *page 19*	Present Simple *he, she, it* Frequency adverbs	People in your life Pron. *does* /dʌz/ and /dəz/, /s/, /z/ and /ɪz/	Reading a letter home Speaking *Do you ever …? How often do you …?*
Reading for pleasure 1, *page 24*: Exercises on *He-mail, she-mail* from *On the same wavelength and other stories*			
③ *Lifestyles* *page 25*	*Love / like / don't mind / hate* + verb + *-ing* *Can / can't* for ability	Likes and dislikes Leisure activities and holidays Pron word stress, *can* and *can't*	Listening likes and dislikes, *The Real You!* questionnaire, working with *Mr Perfect* Speaking *What can you do?*
④ *Secrets and lies* *page 30*	Present Continuous now, around now	Telephoning Little white lies	Speaking *Are you a "phonaholic"?* questionnaire, *My wonderful life!* Listening phone conversations Reading a letter to a friend
Reading for pleasure 2, *page 35* Exercises on *Lost opportunities* from *On the same wavelength and other stories*			
⑤ *You are what you wear* *page 36*	*Have got / has got* and *have / has*	Clothes and shopping	Listening clothes, in a shop Writing and speaking *clothes and fashion* Reading The Fashion Maze
⑥ *Have we got news for you!* *page 41*	Past Simple of regular and irregular verbs Time expressions for the past	News stories Pron /d/, /t/ and /ɪd/	Listening a TV news programme, a radio news interview Reading a newspaper article Speaking *When did you last …?* questionnaire
Reading for pleasure 3, *page 46*. Exercises on *The red dress* from *On the same wavelength and other stories*			

Adapted from *Wavelength Elementary* by Kathy Burke and Julia Brooks (Pearson Education Ltd)

In practice, many multi-syllabuses of this type take a grammar syllabus as a starting point. The materials designers then start the long and often frustrating business of trying to match this list with all the other items they wish to include – the vocabulary and the skills, the tasks and the functions. As the process goes on, the original order of the grammar syllabus will have to change to accommodate some of the other claims; the list of functions will shift around to accommodate the grammar, and the tasks will have to take account of the language at the students' disposal for the performing of those tasks. No one element predominates; all have to shift to accommodate the others, and the end result is always a compromise between the competing claims of the different organising elements.

B Choosing coursebooks

The 'assessment' of a coursebook is an out-of-class judgement as to how well a new book will perform in class. Coursebook 'evaluation', on the other hand, is a judgement on how well a book has performed in fact.

One approach to the assessment of coursebooks is to use a checklist – or checklists prepared by others which analyse various components of the material whether linguistic, topic, or activity based (see Cunningsworth 1984 and 1995; Littlejohn 1998). However, a problem with such assessments is that however good they are, they may still fail to predict what actually happens when the material is used. And when we use a checklist prepared by other people we are accepting their view of what is appropriate in our particular situation. Nevertheless, we need some basis for choosing which books to use or pilot, whether we use checklists prepared by others or whether we make them ourselves (see B1 below). We can then see whether our out-of-class judgements are borne out in reality.

A potential difficulty for successful post-use 'evaluation' of a coursebook, on the other hand, is that 'teachers see no need for systematic and principled post-programme evaluation' (Ellis 1998: 221). In part this is because teachers tend to feel that they 'know' whether a coursebook worked or not, and they are reluctant to give time to a more formal evaluation once a course has finished. Yet we need to evaluate material in a reasonably structured way if we are to properly see if our pre-use assessment was accurate, and whether to continue to use the coursebook.

Whether assessing or evaluating coursebooks, we should do our best to include student opinion and comment. Their view of layout, design, content and feel should inform our pre-use assessment and our post-course evaluation.

B1 Criteria for assessment

The following three-stage procedure allows teachers to assess books on the basis of their own beliefs and their assessment of their students' needs and circumstances:

- **Selecting areas for assessment:** we first need to list the features we wish to look at in the coursebook(s) under consideration, as in the following example:

Price (of coursebook components)
Availability
Layout and design
Instructions
Methodology
Syllabus type, selection and grading
Language study activities
Language skill activities
Topics
Cultural acceptability
Usability
Teacher's guide

The list can be reduced or expanded, of course. We might separate language study activities into vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, for example; or, we might want to concentrate solely on topics and cultural acceptability. We can choose what we want to focus on in the light of our own teaching situation.

- **Stating beliefs:** we are now in a position to make 'belief statements' about any or all of the areas we have decided to concentrate on. This can be done by a group of teachers writing their individual beliefs and then combining them into an agreed set – such as the following statements about layout:

The page should look clean and uncluttered.
The lesson sequence should be easy to follow.
The illustrations should be attractive and appropriate.
The instructions should be easy to read.

- **Using statements for assessment:** we are now ready to use our statements of belief as assessment items. This means that for each of our areas we list our statements, and can then use a simple tick and cross system to compare different books, as in this layout and design checklist:

Area	Assessment statements	Coursebook 1	Coursebook 2	Coursebook 3
Layout and design	The page is uncluttered.	✓	✗	✓✓
	The lesson sequence is easy to follow.	✓	✓	✗
	The illustrations are attractive and appropriate for the age group.	✓✓	✓	✗
	The instructions are easy to read.	✓	✗	✓✓

B2 Evaluation measures

Evaluation of materials which we have been using is somewhat different from assessment. Once again, however, it can have three stages:

- **Teacher record:** in order to evaluate materials we need to keep a record of how successful different lessons and activities have been. One way of doing this is to keep a diary of what happens in each lesson (see Chapter 24, B1). A more formal version of the same thing might involve detailed comments on each activity, for example:

Unit/lesson: ______________________________
General comments ______________________________
(include timing, effectiveness, ______________________________
ease, etc.): ______________________________

Comment on the advantages/disadvantages of:

Exercise 1: ____________________
Exercise 2: ____________________
Exercise 3: ____________________
Exercise 4: ____________________
Exercise 5: ____________________
Exercise 6: ____________________
How did the students react to the lesson? ____________________
____
____

There are many other ways of keeping records: we could give each activity a score from 0–5; we could design a rating scale to measure student satisfaction with a lesson or parts of a lesson. We could write reports at the end of every week under headings such as *recycling, reading progress, vocabulary work,* or *teacher's guide.* Some teachers write comments in the coursebook itself. But in each case we will end up with something which is more useful than a mere feeling.

- **Teacher discussion:** when new books are being used it helps if the teachers who are using the same book get together and compare their experiences. This may involve going through lessons (and exercises) one by one, or it may centre round a discussion of the audio material and its related exercises. Someone in the group should circulate a record of what is said, so that teachers can review the discussions before coming to a conclusion.
- **Student response:** as with teachers' reactions, student responses can be collected in a number of ways. One way is to ask them if they enjoyed the material they have just been using. This kind of oral feedback can be unreliable, however, since some students can dominate the conversation and influence their colleagues.

  We may get better feedback by asking for a written response to the materials with questions such as the following:

  What was your favourite lesson in the book during the last week? Why?
  What was your least favourite lesson from the book during the last week? Why?
  What was your favourite activity during the last week?
  What was your least favourite activity during the last week? Why?
  etc.

Because students' perception of their own progress will influence their responses to the material they are using, it is important to encourage them to assess their own performance, in the ways we suggested in Chapter 7, B2, and to discuss the conclusions they come to. Alternatively, we could have them (in groups) talk about the lessons they have been studying and provide a short written summary of their group's joint conclusions.

The information gained through the evaluations we have been discussing now has to be set against other measures such as achievement test scores (see Chapter 23, A1), and durability. With all this information we can compare results with colleagues so that we reach confident decisions about whether the book has lived up to the original assessment we made of it.

C Using coursebooks

For years methodologist have been arguing about the usefulness of coursebooks, questioning their role (Allwright 1981), defending their use (O'Neill 1982), worrying that they act as methodological straitjackets (Tice 1991) or promoting their value as agents of methodological change (Hutchinson and Torres 1994).

C1 Coursebook or no coursebook?

The benefits and restrictions of coursebook use can be easily summarised:

- **Benefits:** good coursebooks are carefully prepared to offer a coherent syllabus, satisfactory language control, motivating texts, tapes and other accessories such as videotapes, CD-ROMs, extra resource material, and useful web links. They are often attractively presented. They provide teachers under pressure with the reassurance that, even when they are forced to plan at the last moment, they will be using material which they can have confidence in. They come with detailed teacher's guides which not only provide procedures for the lesson in the student's book, but also offer suggestions and alternatives, extra activities, and resources. The adoption of a new coursebook provides a powerful stimulus for methodological development (see Hutchinson and Torres 1994).

  Students like coursebooks too since they foster the perception of progress as units and then books are completed. Coursebooks also provide material which students can look back at for revision, and at their best their visual and topic appeal can have a powerfully engaging effect.

- **Restrictions:** coursebooks, used inappropriately, impose learning styles and content on classes and teachers alike appearing to be '*faits accomplis* over which they can have little control' (Littlejohn 1998: 205). Many of them rely on Presentation, Practice, and Production as their main methodological procedure (see Chapter 6, A2) despite recent enthusiasm for other teaching sequences. Units and lessons often follow an unrelenting format so that students and teachers eventually become de-motivated by the sameness of it all. And in their choice of topics coursebooks can sometimes be bland or culturally inappropriate.

One solution to the perceived disadvantages of coursebooks is to do without them altogether, to use a 'do-it-yourself' approach (Block 1991; Maley 1998). Such an approach is extremely attractive. It can offer students a dynamic and varied programme. If they can see its relevance to their own needs, it will greatly enhance their motivation and their trust in what they are being asked to do. It allows teachers to respond on a lesson-by-lesson basis to what is happening in the class. Finally, for the teacher, it means an exciting and creative involvement with texts and tasks.

In order for the DIY approach to be successful teachers need access to (and knowledge of) a wide range of materials, from coursebooks and videos to magazines, novels, encyclopedias, publicity brochures and the Internet. They will have to make (and make use of) a variety of homegrown materials (see Chapter 10G). They will also need the confidence to know when and what to choose, becoming, in effect, syllabus designers in their own right. This not only makes preparing lessons a very time-consuming business, but also runs the risk that students will end up with an incoherent collection of bits and pieces of material. However, where there is time for the proper planning and organisation of DIY teaching, students may well get exceptional programmes of study which are responsive to their needs, and varied in a way that does not abandon coherence.

C2 Options for coursebook use

Where teachers reject a fully DIY approach because of time, a lack of resources, or a preference for published materials, they then have to decide how to use the coursebooks they have chosen. One way of doing this is to start at page 1 and keep going until you get to the end. But that will probably bore both the students and the teacher and has far less chance of answering the needs of a class than if teachers use the book more creatively, adapting it in various ways to suit the situation they and their students are in.

When we plan a lesson around our coursebook, we have a number of possible options:

- **Omit and replace:** the first decision we have to make is whether to use a particular coursebook lesson or not. If the answer is 'no', there are two possible courses of action. The first is just to omit the lesson altogether. In this case we suppose that the students will not miss it because it does not teach anything fundamentally necessary and it is not especially interesting. When, however, we think the language or topic area in question is important, we will have to replace the coursebook lesson with our own preferred alternative.

  Although there is nothing wrong with omitting or replacing coursebook material, it becomes irksome for many students if it happens too often, especially where they have had to buy the book themselves. It may also deny them the chance to revise (a major advantage of coursebooks), and their course may lose overall coherence.

- **To change or not to change?** When we decide to use a coursebook lesson we can, of course, do so without making any substantial changes to the way it is presented. However, we might decide to use the lesson, but to change it to make it more appropriate for our students. If the material is not very substantial we might add something to it – a role-play after a reading text, perhaps, or extra situations for language practice. We might rewrite an exercise we do not especially like or replace one activity or text with something else such as a download from the Internet, or any other homegrown items (see Chapter 10G). We could re-order the activities within a lesson, or even re-order lessons (within reason). Finally, we may wish to reduce a lesson by cutting out an exercise or an activity. In all our decisions, however, it is important to remember that students need to be able to see a coherent pattern to what we are doing and understand our reasons for changes.

Using coursebooks appropriately is an art which becomes clearer with experience. If the teacher approaches lesson planning (see Chapter 22B) in the right frame of mind, it happens almost as a matter of course. The options we have discussed for coursebook use are summarised in Figure 24:

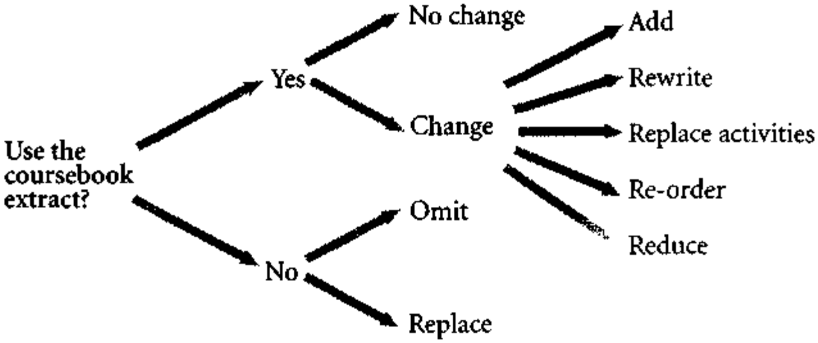


FIGURE 24: Options for coursebook use

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Choosing appropriate topics**
  On classroom needs (and 'wants') analysis, see P Seedhouse (1995) and L Kuc (1999).
- **Culture in language materials and teaching**
  See C Alptekin (1993) and M Zülkuf Altan (1995). A Pulverness (1995) argues for the importance of cross-cultural awareness.
- **Gender issues in coursebook design**
  See C Manheim (1994) and other articles in J Sunderland (ed.) (1994: Quadrant 11).
- **Syllabus and curriculum**
  See D Nunan (1988b) on the 'learner-centred curriculum'. The Council of Europe has commissioned detailed syllabuses. See, for example, J Van Ek and J Trim (1998, 1999, and 2001).
- **The lexical syllabus**
  On the lexical syllabus, see D Willis (1990) and also M Lewis (1993 and 1997) – though see S Thornbury (1998).

The only coursebook to have used a lexical syllabus as its main organising principle is D and J Willis (1988–1989).

- **Functional syllabuses**

  For functional syllabus design see K Johnson (1982: Chapter 8), K Johnson and K Morrow (1978), and C Brumfit (1980).

- **The situational syllabus**

  For an example of a situational syllabus approach absorbed into a multi-syllabus for tourism students, see M Jacob and P Strutt (1997).

- **Grading tasks**

  C Candlin (1987) attempts a complex task-grading system. On the evaluation of tasks see R Ellis (1998).

- **Coursebooks – to use or not to use**

  I Freebairn (2000) defends coursebook use, though S Thornbury (2000), using the example of 'Dogme' film makers, suggests (half seriously) material-free classrooms where communication between teacher and students is all that matters.

- **Coursebook evaluation**

  See A Cunningsworth (1984 and 1995) and A Littlejohn (1998).

- **The Internet in a non-coursebook programme**

  D Teeler (2000: Chapter 6) shows how the Internet can be used as an alternative to a coursebook, giving guidance about routines and planning.

  Internet-based courses for self-study are available on the Web. At the time of writing two of the best are the Surf2school site at /www.surf2school.com/ and Global English at /www.globalenglish.com/. However, many other organisations run, or are in the process of designing, online courses and learning systems (see Chapter 10F).

- **Using coursebooks**

  Neville Grant offered the options of 'omit, replace, add and adapt' for coursebook users – see N Grant (1987: Chapter 1). R Acklam (1994) suggested 'SARS', which stands for Select, Adapt, Replace, Supplement. A Maley says that materials use is a 'complex trade-off between the three major elements in the equation: the materials, the teachers and the learners' (1998: 279).

22 Planning lessons

Lesson planning is the art of combining a number of different elements into a coherent whole so that a lesson has an identity which students can recognise, work within, and react to – whatever metaphor teachers may use to visualise and create that identity. But plans – which help teachers identify aims and anticipate potential problems – are proposals for action rather than scripts to be followed slavishly, whether they are detailed documents or hastily scribbled notes.

A Pre-planning

Before we start to make a lesson plan we need to consider a number of crucial factors such as the language level of our students, their educational and cultural background (see Chapter 6, B1), their likely levels of motivation (see Chapter 3C), and their different learning styles (Chapter 3, B3). Such knowledge is, of course, more easily available when we have spent time with a group than it is at the beginning of a course. When we are not yet familiar with the character of a group, we need to do our best to gain as much understanding of them as we can before starting to make decisions about what to teach.

We also need a knowledge of the content and organisation of the syllabus or curriculum we are working with (see Chapter 21A), and the requirements of any exams which the students are working towards (see Chapter 23).

Armed now with our knowledge of the students and of the syllabus we can go on to consider the four main planning elements:

- **Activities:** when planning, it is vital to consider what students will be doing in the classroom; we have to consider the way they will be grouped, whether they are to move around the class, whether they will work quietly side-by-side researching on the Internet or whether they will be involved in a boisterous group-writing activity.

  We should make decisions about activities almost independently of what language or skills we have to teach. Our first planning thought should centre round what kind of activity would be best for a particular group of students at a particular point in a lesson, or on a particular day. By deciding what kind of activity to offer them – in the most general sense – we have a chance to balance the exercises in our lessons in order to offer the best possible chance of engaging and motivating the class.

The best lessons offer a variety of activities within a class period. Students may find themselves standing up and working with each other for five minutes before returning to their seats and working for a time on their own. The same lesson may end with a whole-class discussion or with pairs writing dialogues to practise a language function or grammar point.

- **Skills:** we need to make a decision about which language skills we wish our students to develop. This choice is sometimes determined by the syllabus or the coursebook. However, we still need to plan exactly how students are going to work with the skill and what sub-skills we wish to practise.

  Planning decisions about language skills and sub-skills are co-dependent with the content of the lesson and with the activities which the teachers will get students to take part in.

- **Language:** we need to decide what language to introduce and have the students learn (see Chapter 11A), practise (see Chapter 11, B3), research (see Chapter 12) or use (see Chapters 18 and 19).

  One of the dangers of planning is that where language is the main focus it is the first and only planning decision that teachers make. Once the decision has been taken to teach the present continuous, for example, it is sometimes tempting to slip back into a drill-dominated teaching session which lacks variety and which may not be the best way to achieve our aims. But language is only one area that we need to consider when planning lessons.

- **Content:** lesson planners have to select content which has a good chance of provoking interest and involvement. Since they know their students personally they are well placed to select appropriate content.

  Even where the choice of subject and content is to some extent dependent on a coursebook, we can still judge when and if to use the coursebook's topics, or whether to replace them with something else. We can predict, with some accuracy, which topics will work and which will not.

  However, the most interesting content can be made bland if the activities and tasks that go with it are unimaginative. Similarly, subjects that are not especially fascinating can be used extremely successfully if the good planner takes time to think about how students can best work with them.

When thinking about the elements we have discussed above we carry with us not only the knowledge of the students, but also our belief in the need to create an appropriate balance between variety and coherence. With all of these features in mind we can finally pass all our thinking through the filter of practical reality, where our knowledge of the classrooms we work in, the equipment we can use, the time we have available, and the attitude of the institution we work in all combine to focus our planning on what we are actually going to do. Now, as Figure 25 on the next page shows, we are in a position to move from pre-planning to the plan itself.

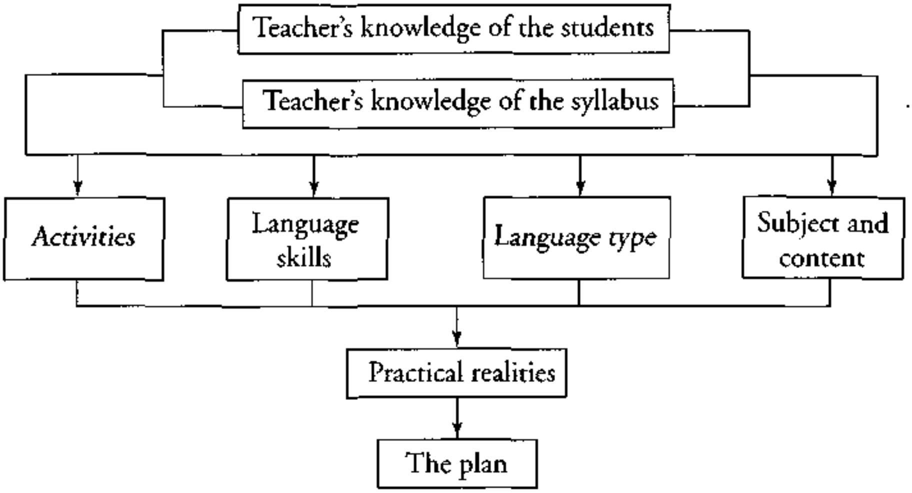


FIGURE 25: Pre-planning and the plan

B The plan

Having done some pre-planning and made decisions about the kind of lesson we want to teach, we can make the lesson plan. This may take a number of different forms, depending upon the circumstances of the lesson and depending also, on our attitude to planning in general.

B1 The planning continuum

The way that teachers plan lessons depends upon the circumstances in which the lesson is to take place and on the teacher's experience. Near one end of a 'planning continuum', teachers may do all the (vague) pre-planning in their head and make actual decisions about what to include in the lesson as they hurry along the corridor to the class. Those with experience can get away with this some of the time because they have a number of familiar routines to fall back on.

Another scenario near the same end of the continuum occurs when teachers are following a coursebook and they do exactly what the book says, letting the coursebook writers, in effect, do their planning for them. This is especially attractive for teachers under extreme time pressure, though if we do not spend time thinking about how to use the coursebook activities (and what happens when we do) we may run into difficulties later. Really effective coursebook use is more complex than this (see Chapter 21, C2).

At the very end of the planning continuum is the kind of lesson described by one writer as the 'jungle path', where teachers walk into class with no real idea of what they are going to do (Scrivener 1994b: 34–37); thus they might say *What did you do last weekend?* and base the class on what replies they get. They might ask the students what they want to do that day, or take in an activity to start the class with no real idea of where it will lead them and their students. Such an approach is favoured by Mario Rinvolucri, who has suggested that instead of working to a pre-arranged plan, a teacher should be more like a doctor, basing treatment upon accurate diagnosis. All classes and students are different, he argued, so to decide beforehand what they should learn on a given day (especially when this is done some days before) is to confine them to a mental structure and ignore the 'flesh-and-blood here-and-now learners' (Rinvolucri 1996).

Experienced teachers may well be able to run effective lessons in this way, without making a plan at all. When such lessons are successful they can be immensely rewarding for all concerned. But more often they run the risk of being muddled and aimless. There is a real danger that if teachers do not have a clear idea of their aims – and, crucially, if the students cannot or will not help to give the lesson shape, 'then nothing useful or meaningful can be achieved at all' (Malamah-Thomas 1987: 3). And though some students may enjoy the adventure of the jungle path, the majority will benefit both linguistically and psychologically from the forethought the teacher has given to the lesson.

At the other end of the continuum teachers write formal plans for their classes which detail what they are going to do and why (see B3 below), perhaps because they are about to be observed or because they are required to do so by some authority.

The vast majority of lesson planning probably takes place between these two extremes. Teachers may scribble things in their notebooks, sometimes only noting the page of a book or the name of an activity. Other teachers may write something more complex. Perhaps they list the words they are going to need, or write down questions they wish to ask. They may make a list of the web sites they want students to visit together with the information they have to look for online (see Chapter 10F).

We can represent this planning continuum diagrammatically in the following way:

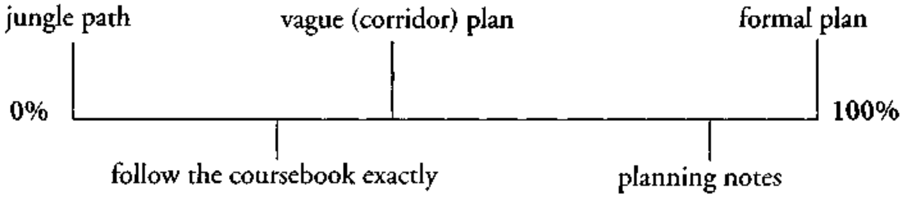


FIGURE 26: The planning continuum

The actual form a plan takes is less important than the thought that has gone into it; the overriding principle is that we should have an idea of what we hope our students will achieve in the class, and that this should guide our decisions about how to bring it about. However, written plans (both sketchy and more detailed) do have a secondary function as a record of what has gone on (see C2 below), and in the lesson itself they help to remind teachers of what they had decided to do, what materials they need, and how long they had planned to spend on certain activities.

B2 Making a plan

The following example of making a plan exemplifies how a teacher might proceed from pre-planning to a final plan.

- **Pre-planning background:** for this lesson, some of the facts that feed into pre-planning decisions are as follows:

    1. The class is at intermediate level. There are 31 students. They are between the ages of 18 and 31. They are enthusiastic and participate well when not overtired.
    2. The students need 'waking up' at the beginning of a lesson.
    3. They are quite prepared to 'have a go' with creative activities.
    4. Lessons take place in a light classroom equipped with a whiteboard and an overhead projector.
    5. The overall topic thread into which the lesson fits involves forms of transport and different travelling environments. In the coursebook this will change next week to the topic of 'avoidable disasters'.
    6. The next item on the grammar syllabus is the construction *should have + DONE.*
    7. The students have not had any reading skills work recently.
    8. The students need more oral fluency work.

- **Pre-planning decisions:** as a result of the background information listed above the teacher takes the following decisions:

    1. The lesson should include an oral fluency activity.
    2. The lesson should include the introduction of *should have + DONE.*
    3. It would be nice to have some reading in the lesson.
    4. The lesson should continue with the transport theme – but make it significantly different in some way.

- **The plan:** on the basis of our pre-planning decisions we now make our plan. It should be emphasised that the following lists are not examples of any planning format since that is a matter of style unless we are planning formally (see below).

    The teacher has taken the decision to have the students read the text about a space station (see Example 1 in Chapter 11), and build activities around this. The text does not come from their coursebook, but is one the teacher has used before.

    The probable sequence of the lesson will be:

    1. An oral fluency activity with 'changing groups' (see Chapter 8, B2) in which students have to reach a decision about what five personal possessions they would take into space.
    2. Reading for prediction and then gist, in which students are asked to say what they expect to be in a text about a space station, before reading to check their predictions and then reading again for detailed understanding.

3. Ending the story, in which students quickly devise an ending for the story.
4. New language introduction in which the teacher elicits 'should have' sentences and has students say them successfully.
5. Language practice in which students talk about things they did or did not do, and which they should not or should have done.
6. A space job interview in which students plan and role-play an interview for a job in a space station.

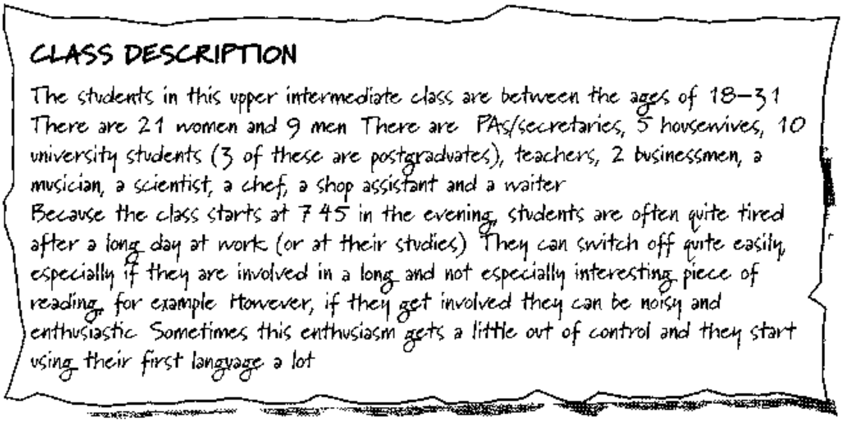
However, the teacher makes (or thinks of) a list of additional task possibilities, for example:

1. Interview Cathy years later to find out what happened to her.
2. Students write a 'newsflash' programme based on what happened.
3. A short extract from a video on future space exploration.
4. Students discuss the three things they would miss most if they were on a space station.

B3 The formal plan

Formal plans are sometimes required, especially when, for example, teachers are to be observed and/or assessed as part of a training scheme or for reasons of internal quality control. A formal plan should contain some or all of the following elements:

- **Class description and timetable fit:** a class description tells us who the students are, and what can be expected of them. It can give information about how the group and how the individuals in it behave, as in the following example:



CLASS DESCRIPTION

The students in this upper intermediate class are between the ages of 18–31 There are 21 women and 9 men There are PAs/secretaries, 5 housewives, 10 university students (3 of these are postgraduates), teachers, 2 businessmen, a musician, a scientist, a chef, a shop assistant and a waiter
Because the class starts at 7 45 in the evening, students are often quite tired after a long day at work (or at their studies) They can switch off quite easily, especially if they are involved in a long and not especially interesting piece of reading, for example However, if they get involved they can be noisy and enthusiastic Sometimes this enthusiasm gets a little out of control and they start using their first language a lot

Depending on the circumstances of the plan, the teacher may want to detail more information about individual students, e.g. *Hiromi has a sound knowledge of English and is very confident in her reading and writing abilities. However, she tends to be rather too quiet in groupwork, since she is not especially comfortable at 'putting herself forward'. This tends to get in the way of the development of her oral fluency.* Such detailed description will be especially appropriate with smaller groups, but becomes increasingly difficult to do accurately with larger classes.

However, a record of knowledge of individual students gained through such means as observation, homework, and test scores is invaluable if we are to meet individual needs.

We also need to say where the lesson fits in a sequence of classes (the before and after) as in the following example:

TIMETABLE FIT

The lesson takes place from 7 45 to 9 pm on Tuesday and Thursday evenings In the past three lessons the students have been discussing the issues of journeys and travelling – how people adapt to different travelling environments They have listened to an interview with someone who lives in a bus and travels around the country looking for places to park it They have been looking at vocabulary and expressions related to travelling. They have revisited a number of past tenses, including hypothetical past (third) conditionals ('If he hadn't lost his job, he wouldn't have sold his house').
Next week the class will start working on a 'crime and punishment' unit which includes a courtroom role-play, with work on crime-related lexis, and passive constructions

We will also include information about how the class have been feeling and what kind of activities they have been involved in (e.g. controlled or communicative, pairwork, or groupwork). All these factors should have influenced our planning choices for this lesson.

- **Lesson aims:** the best classroom aims are specific and directed towards an outcome which can be measured. If we say *My aim is that my students should/can … by the end of the class,* we will be able to tell, after the lesson, whether that aim has been met or not. Aims should reflect what we hope the students will be able to do, not what the teacher is going to do. An aim such as *to teach the present perfect* is not really an aim at all – except for the teacher.

  A lesson will often have more than one aim. We might well say, for example, that our overall objective is to improve our students' reading ability, but that our specific aims are to encourage them to predict content, to use guessing strategies to overcome lexical problems, and to develop an imaginative response to what they encounter.

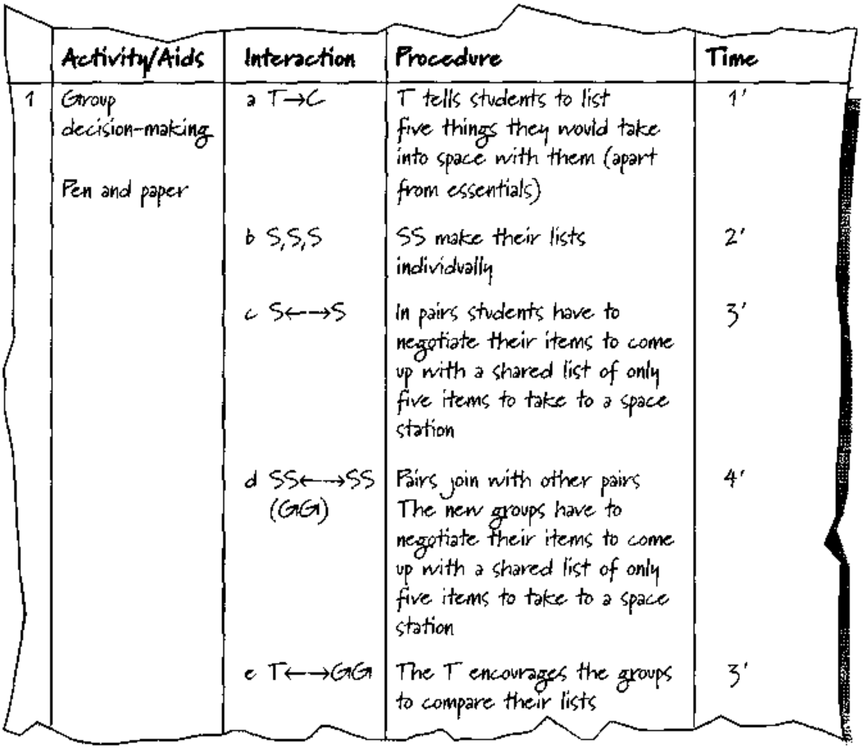
  Aims can be written in plans as in the following example:

AIMS

1 To allow students to practise speaking spontaneously and fluently about something that may provoke the use of words and phrases they have been learning recently.
2 To give students practice in reading both for gist and for detail
3 To enable students to talk about what people have 'done wrong' in the past, using the 'should (not) have' + 'done' construction
4 To have students think of the interview genre and list the kinds of questions which are asked in such a situation

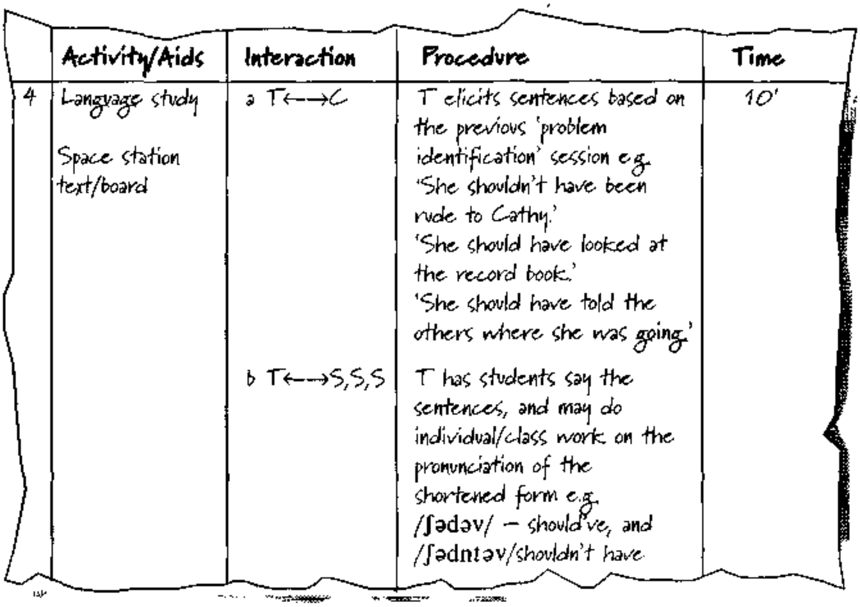
- **Activities, procedures, and timing:** the main body of a formal plan lists the activities and procedures in that lesson, together with the times we expect each of them to take. We will include the aids we are going to use, and show the different interactions which will take place in the class.

  When detailing procedure, 'symbol' shorthand is an efficient tool to describe the interactions that are taking place: *T = teacher; S = an individual student; T→C = the teacher working with the whole class; S,S,S = students working on their own; S←→S = students working in pairs; SS←→SS = pairs of students in discussion with other pairs; GG = students working in groups,* and so on. The following example shows how the procedure of an activity can be described:



	Activity/Aids	Interaction	Procedure	Time
1	Group decision-making Pen and paper	a T→C	T tells students to list five things they would take into space with them (apart from essentials)	1′
		b S,S,S	SS make their lists individually	2′
		c S←→S	In pairs students have to negotiate their items to come up with a shared list of only five items to take to a space station	3′
		d SS←→SS (GG)	Pairs join with other pairs The new groups have to negotiate their items to come up with a shared list of only five items to take to a space station	4′
		e T←→GG	The T encourages the groups to compare their lists	3′

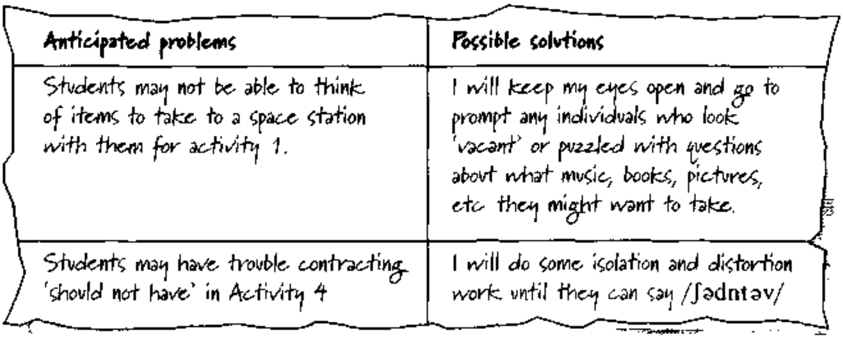
Specific language that is to be focused on should also be included, as in this example:



	Activity/Aids	Interaction	Procedure	Time
4	Language study Space station text/board	a T←→C	T elicits sentences based on the previous 'problem identification' session e.g. 'She shouldn't have been rude to Cathy.' 'She should have looked at the record book.' 'She should have told the others where she was going.'	10'
		b T←→S,S,S	T has students say the sentences, and may do individual/class work on the pronunciation of the shortened form e.g. /ʃədəv/ – should've, and /ʃədntəv/shouldn't have	

- **Problems and possibilities:** a good plan tries to predict potential pitfalls and suggests ways of dealing with them. It also includes alternative activities in case we find it necessary to divert from the lesson sequence we had hoped to follow (see C1 below).

  When listing anticipated problems it is a good idea to think ahead to possible solutions we might adopt to resolve them, as in the following example:



Anticipated problems	Possible solutions
Students may not be able to think of items to take to a space station with them for activity 1.	I will keep my eyes open and go to prompt any individuals who look 'vacant' or puzzled with questions about what music, books, pictures, etc they might want to take.
Students may have trouble contracting 'should not have' in Activity 4	I will do some isolation and distortion work until they can say /ʃədntəv/

Where we need to modify our lesson dramatically, we may choose to abandon what we are doing and use different activities altogether. If our lesson proceeds faster than we had anticipated, on the other hand, we may need additional material anyway. It is therefore sensible, especially in formal planning, to list additional possibilities, as in the following example:

ADDITIONAL POSSIBILITIES

Extra speaking	If some groups finish first they can quickly discuss what three things from home they would most miss if they were on a space station
News broadcast	Students could write an earth 'newsflash' giving news of what happened at the space station starting 'We interrupt this programme to bring you news of
Video clip	If there's time I can show the class an extract from the 'Future of Space Exploration' programme
Interview plus	Interview Cathy years later to find out what happened to her

B4 Planning a sequence of lessons

Planning a sequence of lessons is based on the same principles as planning a single lesson, but there are number of additional issues which we need to pay special attention to:

- **Before and during:** however carefully we plan, in practice unforeseen things are likely to happen during the course of a lesson (as we shall see in C1 below), and so our plans are continually modified in the light of these. Even more than a plan for an individual lesson, a scheme of work for weeks or months of lessons is only a proposal of what we hope to achieve in that time. We will need to revisit this scheme constantly to update it.

- **Short and long-term goals:** however motivated a student may be at the beginning of a course, the level of that motivation may fall dramatically if the student is not engaged or if they cannot see where they are going – or know when they have got there.

  In order for students to stay motivated, they need goals (see Chapter 3, C3) and rewards. While a satisfactory long-term goal may be 'to master the English language', it can seem only a dim and distant possibility at various stages of the learning cycle. In such circumstances students need short-term goals too, such as the completion of some piece of work (or some part of the programme), and rewards such as success on small, staged lesson tests, or taking part in activities designed to recycle knowledge and demonstrate acquisition.

  When we plan a sequence of lessons, we need to build in goals for both students and ourselves to aim at, whether they are end-of-week tests, or major revision lessons. That way we can hope to give our students a staged progression of successfully met challenges.

- **Thematic strands:** one way to approach a sequence of lessons is to focus on different content in each individual lesson. This will certainly provide variety. It might be better, however, for themes to carry over for more than one lesson, or at least to reappear, so that students perceive some coherent topic strands as the course progresses. With such thematic threads we and our students can refer backwards and forwards both in terms of language – especially the vocabulary that certain topics generate – and also in terms of the topics we ask them to invest time in considering.

- **Language planning:** when we plan language input over a sequence of lessons we want to propose a sensible progression of syllabus elements such as grammar, lexis, and functions (see Chapter 21, A2 and A3). We also want to build in sufficient opportunities for recycling or remembering language, and for using language in productive skill work. If we are following a coursebook closely, many of these decisions may already have been taken, but even in such circumstances we need to keep a constant eye on how things are going, and with the knowledge of 'before and after' modify the programme we are working from when necessary.

  Language does not exist in a vacuum, however. Our decisions about how to weave it through the lesson sequence will be heavily influenced by the need for a balance of activities.

- **Activity balance:** the balance of activities over a sequence of lessons is one of the features which will determine the overall level of student involvement in the course. If we get it right, it will also provide the widest range of experience to meet the different learning styles of the students in the class (see Chapter 3, B3).

  Over a period of weeks or months we would expect students to have received a varied diet of activities; they should not have to role-play every day, nor would we expect every lesson to be devoted exclusively to language study (in the ways we described it in Chapter 11). There is a danger, too, that they might become bored if every Friday was the reading class, every Monday the presentation class, every Wednesday was speaking and writing. In such a scenario the level of predictability may have gone beyond the sufficient to the exaggerated. What we are looking for, instead, is a blend of the familiar and the new.

Planning a successful sequence of lessons means taking all these factors into consideration and weaving them together into a colourful but coherent tapestry.

C Using lesson plans

However carefully we plan, and whatever form our plan takes, we will still have to use that plan in the classroom, and use our plans as records of learning for reference.

C1 Action and reaction

Planning a lesson is not the same as scripting a lesson. Wherever our preparations fit on the planning continuum, what we take into the lesson is a proposal for action, rather than a lesson blueprint to be followed slavishly. And our proposal for action, transformed into action in the classroom, is bound to 'evoke some sort of student reaction' (Malamah-Thomas 1987: 5). We then have to decide how to cope with that reaction and whether, in the light of it, we can continue with our plan or whether we need to modify it as we go along.

There are a number of reasons why we may need to modify our proposal for action once a lesson is taking place:

- **Magic moments:** some of the most affecting moments in language lessons happen when a conversation develops unexpectedly, or when a topic produces a level of interest in our students which we had not predicted. The occurrence of such magic moments helps to provide and sustain a group's motivation. We have to recognise them when they come along and then take a judgement about whether to allow them to develop, rather than denying them life because they do not fit into our plan.

- **Sensible diversion:** another reason for diversion from our original plan is when something happens which we simply cannot ignore, whether this is a surprising student reaction to a reading text, or the sudden announcement that someone is getting married! In the case of opportunistic teaching (see Chapter 11, A2), we take the opportunity to teach language that has suddenly come up. Similarly, something might occur to us in terms of topic or in terms of a language connection which we suddenly want to develop on the spot.

- **Unforeseen problems:** however well we plan, unforeseen problems often crop up. Some students may find an activity that we thought interesting incredibly boring; an activity may take more or less time than we anticipated. It is possible that something we thought would be fairly simple for our students turns out to be very difficult (or vice versa). We may have planned an activity based on the number of students we expected to turn up, only to find that some of them are absent. Occasionally we find that students have already come across material or topics we take into class, and our common sense tells us that it would be unwise to carry on.

  In any of the above scenarios it would be almost impossible to carry on with our plan as if nothing had happened; if an activity finishes quickly we have to find something else to fill the time. If students cannot do what we are asking of them, we will have to modify what we are asking of them. If some students (but not all) have already finished an activity we cannot just leave those students to get bored.

  It is possible to anticipate potential problems in the class (see C2 below) and to plan strategies to deal with them. But however well we do this, things will still happen that surprise us, and which, therefore, cause us to move away from our plan, whether this is a temporary or permanent state of affairs.

However well we plan, our plan is just a suggestion of what we might do in class. Everything depends upon how our students respond and relate to it. In Jim Scrivener's words, 'prepare thoroughly. But in class, teach the learners – not the plan' (Scrivener 1994b: 44).

C2 Plans as records and research tools

Written plans are not just proposals for future action; they are also records of what has taken place. Thus, when we are in the middle of a sequence of lessons, we can look back at what we have done in order to decide what to do next.

Since we may have to modify our lessons depending on student reactions we need to keep a record of how successful certain activities were to aid our memory. A record of lessons can also help colleagues if and when they have to teach for us when we are absent.

Our original written plans will, therefore, have to be modified in the light of what actually happened in the classes we taught. This may simply mean crossing out the original activity title or coursebook page number, and replacing it with what we used in reality. However, if we have time to record how we and the students experienced the lesson, reflecting carefully on successful and less successful activities, not only will this help us to make changes if and when we want to use the same activities again, but it will also lead us to think about how we teach and consider changes in both activities and approach. Lesson planning in this way allows us to act as our own observers and aids us in our own development (see Chapter 24, B1).

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Lesson metaphors**

  Penny Ur (1996: 213) and Scott Thornbury (1999b) both suggest seeing lessons as, for example, a show, a menu, a story, a film. Thornbury stresses the importance of the 'sense of an ending' for lessons.

- **To plan or not to plan?**

  When Craig Thaine wrote an article about getting teacher trainees to plan a sequence of lessons (Thaine 1996a), Mario Rinvolucri replied with a letter attacking the whole principle of lesson planning (Rinvolucri 1996). Thaine's reply (Thaine 1996b) defending the need for (and benefits of) planning helps to make the three contributions into a fascinating discussion about the purpose and value of planning.

- **Unforeseen problems**

  See R Gower et al. (1995: 178).

23 Testing students

A The characteristics of tests

A1 Different types of test

There are four main reasons for testing which give rise to four categories of test:

- **Placement tests:** placing new students in the right class in a school is facilitated with the use of placement tests. Usually based on syllabuses and materials the students will follow and use once their level has been decided on, these test grammar and vocabulary knowledge and assess students' productive and receptive skills.

  Some schools ask students to assess themselves as part of the placement process, adding this self-analysis into the final placing decision.

- **Diagnostic tests:** while placement tests are designed to show how good a student's English is in relation to a previously agreed system of levels, diagnostic tests can be used to expose learner difficulties, gaps in their knowledge, and skill deficiencies during a course. Thus, when we know what the problems are, we can do something about them.

- **Progress or achievement tests:** these tests are designed to measure learners' language and skill progress in relation to the syllabus they have been following.

  Achievement tests only work if they contain item types which the students are familiar with. This does not mean that in a reading test, for example, we give them texts they have seen before, but it does mean providing them with similar texts and familiar task types. If students are faced with completely new material, the test will not measure the learning that has been taking place, even though it can still measure general language proficiency.

  Achievement tests at the end of a term (like progress tests at the end of a unit, a fortnight, etc.) should reflect progress, not failure. They should reinforce the learning that has taken place, not go out of their way to expose weaknesses. They can also help us to decide on changes to future teaching programmes where students do significantly worse in (parts of) the test than we might have expected.

- **Proficiency tests:** proficiency tests give a general picture of a student's knowledge and ability (rather than measure progress). They are frequently used as stages people have to reach if they want to be admitted to a foreign university, get a job, or obtain some kind of certificate.

Proficiency tests have a profound backwash effect since, where they are external exams, students obviously want to pass them, and teachers' reputations sometimes depend (probably unfairly) upon how many of them succeed.

A2 Characteristics of a good test

In order to judge the effectiveness of any test it is sensible to lay down criteria against which the test can be measured, as follows:

- **Validity:** a test is valid if it tests what it is supposed to test. Thus it is not valid, for example, to test writing ability with an essay question that requires specialist knowledge of history or biology – unless it is known that all students share this knowledge before they do the test.

  A particular kind of 'validity' that concerns most test designers is face validity. This means that the test should look, on the 'face' of it, as if it is valid. A test which consisted of only three multiple choice items would not convince students of its face validity however reliable or practical teachers thought it to be.

- **Reliability:** a good test should give consistent results. For example, if the same group of students took the same test twice within two days – without reflecting on the first test before they sat it again – they should get the same results on each occasion. If they took another similar test, the results should be consistent. If two groups who were demonstrably alike took the test, the marking range would be the same.

  In practice, 'reliability' is enhanced by making the test instructions absolutely clear, restricting the scope for variety in the answers, and making sure that test conditions remain constant.

  Reliability also depends on the people who mark the tests – the scorers. Clearly a test is unreliable if the result depends to any large extent on who is marking it. Much thought has gone into making the scoring of tests as reliable as possible (see C2 below).

B Types of test item

Whatever purpose a test or exam has, a major factor in its success or failure as a good measuring instrument will be determined by the item types that it contains.

B1 Direct and indirect test items

A test item is **direct** if it asks candidates to perform the communicative skill which is being tested. **Indirect** test items, on the other hand, try to measure a student's knowledge and ability by getting at what lies beneath their receptive and productive skills. Whereas direct test items try to be as much like real-life language use as possible, indirect items try to find out about a student's language knowledge through more controlled items, such as multiple choice questions or grammar transformation items. These are often quicker to design and, crucially, easier to mark, and produce greater scorer reliability.

Another distinction needs to be made between **discrete-point** testing and **integrative** testing. Whereas discrete-point testing only tests one thing at a time (such as asking students to choose the correct tense of a verb), integrative test items expect students to use a variety of language at any one given time – as they will have to do when writing a composition or doing a conversational oral test.

In many proficiency tests where students sit a number of different papers, there is a mixture of direct and indirect, discrete-point and integrative testing. Test designers find that this combination gives a good overall picture of student ability. Placement tests often use discrete-point testing to measure students against an existing language syllabus, but may then compare this with more direct and integrative tasks to get a fuller picture.

B2 Indirect test item types

Although there is a wide range of indirect test possibilities, certain types are in common use:

- **Multiple choice questions (MCQs):** a traditional vocabulary multiple choice question looks like this:

  The journalist was ________ by enemy fire as he tried to send a story by radio.

  a wronged **b** wounded **c** injured **d** damaged

  For many years MCQs were considered to be ideal test instruments for measuring students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Above all this was because they were easy to mark, and since the advent of computers the answer books for these tests can be read by machines, not people, thereby cutting out the possibility of scorer error.

  However, there are a number of problems with multiple choice questions. In the first place, they are extremely difficult to write well, especially in the design of the incorrect choices. These 'distractors' may actually put ideas into students' heads that they did not have before they read them. Second, while it is possible to train students so that their MCQ abilities are enhanced, this may not actually improve their English. The difference between two student scores may be between the person who has been trained in the technique and a person who has not, rather than being a difference of language knowledge and ability.

  MCQs are still widely used, but though they score highly in terms of practicality and scorer reliability, their 'validity' and overall 'reliability' are suspect.

- **Cloze procedures:** cloze procedures seem to offer us the ideal indirect but integrative testing item. They can be prepared quickly and if the claims made for them are true, they are an extremely cost-effective way of finding out about a testee's overall knowledge.

  Cloze, in its purest form, is the deletion of every nth word in a text (somewhere between every fifth or tenth word). Because the procedure is random, it avoids test designer failings. It produces test items like this:

> They sat on a bench attached 1 _____ a picnic table. Below them they 2 _______ see the river gurgling between overgrown 3 ______. The sky was diamond blue, with 4 ______ white clouds dancing in the freshening 5 ______. They could hear the call of 6 _______ and the buzzing of countless insects. 7 _______ were completely alone.

Cloze testing seems, on the face of it, like a perfect test instrument, since, because of the randomness of the deleted words, anything may be tested (e.g. grammar, collocation, fixed phrases, reading comprehension), and therefore it becomes more integrative in its reach. However, it turns out that the actual score a student gets depends on the particular words that are deleted, rather than on any general English knowledge. Some are more difficult to supply than others, and in some cases there are several possible answers. Even in the short sample text above it is clear that whilst there is no doubt about items such as 1 and 8, for example, item 4 is less predictable. Different passages produce different results.

Despite such problems of 'reliability', cloze is too useful a technique to abandon altogether, however, because it is clear that supplying the correct word for a blank does imply an understanding of context and a knowledge of that word and how it operates. Perhaps it would be better, therefore, to use 'rational' or 'modified' cloze procedures (Alderson 1996: 222) where the test designer can be sure that the deleted words are recoverable from the context. This means abandoning the completely random nature of traditional cloze procedure. Instead, every eighth or tenth word is deleted, but the teacher has the option to delete a word to the left or right if the context makes this more sensible.

Modified cloze is useful for placement tests since students can be given texts that they would be expected to cope with at certain levels – thus allowing us to judge their suitability for those levels. They are useful, too, as part of a test battery in either achievement or proficiency tests.

- **Transformation and paraphrase:** a common test item asks candidates to rewrite sentences in a slightly different form, retaining the exact meaning of the original. For example, the following item tests the candidates' knowledge of verb and clause patterns that are triggered by the use of *I wish*:

  I'm sorry that I didn't get her an anniversary present.
  I wish ________________________________

  In order to complete the item successfully the student has to understand the first sentence, and then know how to construct an equivalent which is grammatically possible. As such they do tell us something about the candidates' knowledge of the language system.

- **Sentence re-ordering:** getting students to put words in the right order to make appropriate sentences tells us quite a lot about their underlying knowledge of syntax and lexico-grammatical elements. The following example is typical:

Put the words in order to make correct sentences.

called / I / I'm / in / sorry / wasn't / when / you

____

Re-ordering exercises are fairly easy to write, though it is not always possible to ensure only one correct order.

There are many other indirect techniques too, including sentence fill-ins (*Jan _____ to the gym every Tuesday morning*), choosing the correct tense of verbs in sentences and passages (*I have arrived/arrived yesterday*), finding errors in sentences (*She noticed about his new jacket*), and choosing the correct form of a word (*He didn't enjoy being on the (lose) _____ side*). All of these offer items which are quick and efficient to score and which aim to tell us something about a student's underlying knowledge.

B3 Direct test item types

For direct test items to achieve 'validity' and to be 'reliable', test designers need to do the following:

- **Create a 'level playing field':** in the case of a written test, teachers and candidates would almost certainly complain about the following essay question:

  Why was the discovery of DNA so important for the science of the twentieth century?

  since it unfairly favours candidates who have sound scientific knowledge and presupposes a knowledge of twentieth-century scientific history.

  However, the following topic comes close to ensuring that all candidates have the same chance of success:

  Some businesses now say that no one can smoke cigarettes in or even near any of their offices. Some governments have banned smoking in all public places – whether outside or inside.
  This is a good idea but it also takes away some of our freedom.
  Do you agree or disagree?
  Give reasons for your answer.

  General writing question from *The IELTS Handbook* (see notes at the end of this chapter)

  Receptive skill testing also needs to avoid making excessive demands on the student's general or specialist knowledge. Receptive ability testing can also be undermined if the means of testing requires students to perform well in writing or speaking (when it is a test of reading or listening). In such a situation we can no longer be sure that it is the receptive skill we are measuring.

- **Replicate real-life interaction:** in real life when people speak or write they generally do so with some real purpose. Yet traditional writing tests have often been based exclusively on general essay questions, and speaking tests often included hypothetical questions about what candidates might say if they happened to be in a certain situation. More modern test writers now include tasks which attempt to replicate features of real life (Weir 1993: 167). They will often look similar to the kind of speaking activities described in Chapter 19.

  Tests of reading and listening should also, as far as possible, reflect real life. This means that texts should be as realistic as possible, even where they are not authentic (see Chapter 14, B1). Although there are ways of assessing student understanding (using matching tasks or multiple choice questions) which do not necessarily satisfy these criteria, test items should be as much like real reading and listening as possible.

The following direct test item types are a few of the many which attempt to meet the criteria we have mentioned above:

SPEAKING

- an interviewer questioning a candidate about themselves
- 'information gap' activities where a candidate has to find out information either from an interlocutor or a fellow candidate. (The role-play on page 279, Example 5, would not need much modification to serve as a test item.)
- 'decision-making' activities, such as showing paired candidates ten photos of people and asking them to put them in order of the best and worst dressed
- using pictures for candidates to compare and contrast, whether they can both see them or whether (as in many communication games) they have found similarities and differences without being able to look at each other's material
- role-play activities where candidates perform tasks such as introducing themselves, or ringing a theatre to book tickets

WRITING

- writing compositions and stories
- 'transactional letters' where candidates reply to a job advertisement, or pen a complaint to a hotel based on information given in the exam paper
- information leaflets about their school or a place in their town
- a set of instructions for some common task
- newspaper articles about a recent event

READING

- multiple choice questions to test comprehension of a text
- matching written descriptions with pictures of the items, or procedure, they describe

- transferring written information to charts, graphs, maps, etc. (though special care has to be taken not to disadvantage non-mathematically minded candidates)
- choosing the best summary of a paragraph or a whole text
- matching jumbled headings with paragraphs
- inserting sentences provided by the examiner in the correct place in the text

LISTENING

- completing charts with facts and figures from a listening text
- identifying which of a number of objects (pictures on the test paper) is being described
- identifying which (out of two or three speakers) says what
- identifying whether speakers are enthusiastic, encouraging, in disagreement, or amused
- following directions on a map and identifying the correct house or place

In the interests of 'reliability', listening tests are most often supplied on tape to ensure that all candidates have the same opportunities, irrespective of the speakers' voices, speeds, or expressions. Sometimes, as in the computerised TOEFL test (see the notes at the end of this chapter) candidates work with headphones from an individual computer. Where a group of students listen to the same tape or disk, however, we need to be sure that the material is clearly and easily audible (see Chapter 16, A2).

C Writing and marking tests

At various times during our teaching careers we may have to write tests for the students we are teaching, and mark the tests they have completed for us. These may range from a lesson test at the end of the week to an achievement test at the end of a term or a year.

C1 Writing tests

Before designing a test and then giving it to a group of students, there are a number of things we need to do:

- **Assess the test situation:** before we start to write the test we need to remind ourselves of the context in which the test takes place. We have to decide how much time should be given to the test-taking, when and where it will take place, and how much time there is for marking.

- **Decide what to test:** we have to list what we want to include in our test. This means taking a conscious decision to include or exclude skills such as reading comprehension or speaking (if speaking tests are impractical). It means knowing what syllabus items can be legitimately included (in an achievement test), and what kinds of topics and situations are appropriate for our students.

  Just because we have a list of all the vocabulary items or grammar points the students have studied over the term, this does not mean we have to test every single item. If we include a representative sample from across the whole list, the students' success or failure with those items will be a good indicator of how well they have learnt all of the language they have studied.

- **Balance the elements:** if we are to include direct and indirect test items we have to make a decision about how many of each we should put in our test. A 200-item multiple choice test with a short real-life writing task tacked onto the end suggests that we think that MCQs are a better way of finding out about students than more integrative writing tasks would be.

  Balancing elements involves estimating how long we want each section of the test to take and then writing test items within those time constraints. The amount of space and time we give to the various elements should also reflect their importance in our teaching.

- **Weight the scores:** however well we have balanced the elements in our test, our perception of our students' success or failure will depend upon how many marks are given to each section or sections of the test. If we give two marks for each of our ten MCQs, but only one mark for each of our ten transformation items, it means that it is more important for students to do well in the former than in the latter.

- **Making the test work:** it is absolutely vital that we try out individual items and/or whole tests on colleagues and students alike before administering them to real candidates.

  When we write test items the first thing to do is to get fellow teachers to try them out. Frequently they spot problems which we are not aware of and/or come up with possible answers and alternatives that we had not anticipated.

  Later, having made changes based on our colleagues' reactions, we will want to try out the test on students. We will not do this with the students who are going to take the test, of course, but if we can find a class that is roughly similar – or a class one level above the proposed test – then we will soon find out what items cause unnecessary problems. We can also discover how long the test takes.

  Such trialling is designed to avoid disaster, and to yield a whole range of possible answers/responses to the various test items. This means that when other people finally mark the test we can give them a list of possible alternatives and thus ensure reliable scoring.

C2 Marking tests

When Cyril Weir gave copies of the same eight exam scripts to his postgraduate students they marked them first on the basis of 'impressionistic' marking out of a possible total of 20 marks. The results were alarming. Some scorers gave higher marks overall than others. But for some of the EFL student scripts, the range of marks was excessive. For one script the lowest mark awarded was 5, whereas another scorer gave it 20. For another the range was 1–15. As Cyril Weir writes 'the worst scripts … if they had been marked by certain markers, might have been given higher marks than the best scripts!' (1993: 157).

There are a number of solutions to this kind of scorer subjectivity:

- **Training:** if scorers have seen examples of scripts at various different levels and discussed what marks they should be given, then their marking is likely to be less erratic than if they come to the task fresh. If scorers are allowed to watch and discuss videoed oral tests, they can be trained to 'rate the samples of spoken English accurately and consistently in terms of the pre-defined descriptions of performance' (Saville and Hargreaves 1999: 49).
- **More than one scorer:** reliability can be greatly enhanced by having more than one scorer. The more people who look at a script, the greater the chance that its true worth will be located somewhere between the various scores it is given. Two examiners watching an oral test are likely to agree a more reliable score than one.

  Many public examination boards use **moderators** whose job it is to check samples of individual scorers' work to see that it conforms with the general standards laid down for the exam.
- **Global assessment scales:** a way of specifying scores that can be given to productive skill work is to create 'pre-defined descriptions of performance'. Such descriptions say what students need to be capable of in order to gain the required marks, as in the following assessment (or rating) scale for oral ability:

Score	Description
0	The candidate is almost unintelligible, uses words wrongly, and shows no sign of any grammatical understanding.
1	The candidate is able to transmit only very basic ideas using individual words rather than phrases or fuller patterns of discourse. Speech is very hesitant and the pronunciation makes intelligibility difficult.
2	The candidate transmits basic ideas in a fairly stilted way. Pronunciation is sometimes problematic and there are examples of grammatical and lexical misuse and gaps which impede communication on occasions.
3	The candidate transmits ideas moderately clearly. Speech is somewhat hesitant and there are frequent lapses in grammar and vocabulary use. Nevertheless, the candidate makes him/herself understood.
4	The candidate speaks fairly fluently, showing an ability to communicate ideas with not too much trouble. There are some problems of grammatical accuracy and some words are inappropriately used.
5	The candidate speaks fluently with few obvious mistakes and a wide variety of lexis and expression. Pronunciation is almost always intelligible, and there is little difficulty in communicating ideas.

Global assessment scales are not without problems, however: perhaps the description does not exactly match the student who is speaking as in a case (for the scale above) where he or she had very poor pronunciation but was nevertheless grammatically accurate. There is also the danger that different teachers 'will not agree on the meaning of scale descriptors' (Upshur and Turner 1995: 5). Global assessment, on its own, still falls short of the kind of reliability we wish to achieve.

- **Analytic profiles:** marking gets more reliable when a student's performance is analysed in much greater detail. Instead of just a general assessment, marks are awarded for different elements.

  For oral assessment we can judge a student's speaking in a number of different ways such as pronunciation, fluency, use of lexis and grammar, and intelligibility. We may want to rate their ability to get themselves out of trouble (repair skills) and how well they successfully completed the task which we set them.

  The resulting analytic profile might end up looking like this:

Criteria	Score (see analytic scales)
Pronunciation	
Fluency	
Use of vocabulary	
Use of grammar	
Intelligibility	
Repair skills	
Task completion	

For each separate criterion, we can now provide a separate 'analytic scale', as in the following example for fluency:

Score	Description
0	The candidate cannot get words or phrases out at all.
1	The candidate speaks hesitatingly in short, interrupted bursts.
2	The candidate speaks slowly with frequent pauses.
3	The candidate speaks at a comfortable speed with quite a lot of pauses and hesitations.
4	The candidate speaks at a comfortable speed with only an occasional pause or upset.
5	The candidate speaks quickly with few hesitations.

A combination of global and analytic scoring gives us the best chance of reliable marking. However, a profusion of criteria may make the marking of a test extremely lengthy and cumbersome; test designers and administrators will have to decide how to accommodate the competing claims of reliability and practicality.

- **Scoring and interacting during oral tests:** scorer reliability in oral tests is helped not only by global assessment scores and analytic profiles but also by separating the role of scorer (or examiner) from the role of **interlocutor** (the examiner who guides and provokes conversation). This may cause practical problems, but it will allow the scorer to observe and assess, free from the responsibility of keeping the interaction with the candidate or candidates going.

  In many tests of speaking, students are now put in pairs or groups for certain tasks since it is felt that this will ensure genuine interaction, and will help to relax students in a way that interlocutor–candidate interaction might fail to do on its own. However, at least one commentator worries that pairing students in this way leads candidates to perform below their level of proficiency, and that when students with the same mother tongue are paired together their intelligibility to the examiner may suffer (Foot 1999: 52).

D Teaching the test

When students are preparing for a public exam or school test it is the teacher's responsibility not only to help them get their English to the level required, but also familiarise them with the kinds of exam items they are likely to encounter, and give them training in how to succeed.

Students can be prepared for future tests and exams in a variety of ways:

- **Training for test types:** we can show the various test types and ask them what the item is testing so that they are clear about what is required. We can help them to understand what the test or exam designer is aiming for; by showing them the kind of marking scales that are used, we can make them aware of what constitutes success. We can then give them training to help them approach such items more effectively. After they have completed a test item type we can tell them what score an examiner might give and why. We will also equip students with appropriate negotiating language (see Chapter 19, A1) to help them get over awkward moments in such tasks.

  When training students to handle reading test items we will discuss with them the best way to approach a first reading of the text, and how that can be modified on second reading to allow them to answer the questions provided.

  If the test or exam is likely to contain multiple choice questions, we can help students to appreciate the advantages of finding the obvious distractor(s) first. They can then work out what similarities and differences the other distractors have so that they can identify the area of meaning or grammar that is being targeted.

- **Discussing general exam skills:** most students benefit from being reminded about general test and exam skills, without which much of the work they do will be wasted. Such general skills for written tests include studying questions properly, and then reading them again so that they are absolutely sure what they should do. Students need to check their work over thoroughly before considering that they have finished. They need to pace themselves so that they do not spend a disproportionate amount of time on only one part of an exam.

- **Doing practice tests:** students need a chance to practise taking the test or exam so that they get a feel for the experience, especially with regard to issues such as pacing. At various points in a course students can sit practice papers, or whole practice tests, but this should not be done too often since not only will it give teachers horrific marking schedules, but it will also be less productive than other test and exam preparation procedures are.

- **Promoting autonomy:** although we can do a lot of exam preparation in class, we need to impress on students that their chances of success are far greater if they study and revise on their own. We will want them to read more, listen more, work on self-study exercises, and use dictionaries and other means to build up their language store. All of these activities are desirable for any student (see Chapter 24, A1), but are especially appropriate when an exam is approaching.

- **Having fun:** just because students need to practise certain test types does not mean this has to be done in a boring or tense manner. There are a number of ways of having fun with tests and exams.

  If a typical test item asks candidates to put words in order to make sentences (see B2 above), the teacher might prepare the class for this kind of item by giving students a number of words on cards which they have to physically assemble into sentences. They can hold them above their heads (so that they cannot see the words on them) and their classmates have to tell them where to stand to make a 'human sentence'. Students can play 'transformation tennis' where one student 'serves' a sentence, e.g. *India is the country I would like to visit more than any other* and the receiving student has to reply with a transformation starting with *The country*, e.g. *The country I would most like to visit is India* (Prodromou 1995: 22–23). They can change the sex of all the people in direct and indirect test items to see if the items still work and if not, why not.

  Students can be encouraged to write their own test items, based on language they have been working on and the examples they have seen so far. The new test items can now be given to other students to see how well they have been written and how difficult they are. This helps students to get into the minds of their test and exam writers.

- **Ignoring the test:** if students who are studying for an exam only ever look at test types, discuss exam technique, and take practice tests, lessons may become monotonous. There is also the possibility that general English improvement will be compromised at the expense of exam preparation.

When we are preparing students for an exam, we need to ignore the exam from time to time so that we have opportunities to work on general language issues, and so that students can take part in the kind of motivating activities that are appropriate for all English lessons.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Public exams**

  Among the international exams which students can take are the following:

  - Cambridge exams are offered by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), Cambridge, UK (http://www.cambridge-efl.org.uk). These are exams in general English. There are five main levels:
    - Key English Test (KET) for elementary candidates
    - Preliminary English Test (PET) for lower intermediate candidates
    - First Certificate in English (FCE) for upper intermediate candidates
    - Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) for upper intermediate/advanced candidates
    - Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) for very advanced candidates
  - City and Guilds Pitman qualifications offered by City and Guilds, London (http://www.city-and-guilds.co.uk/Pitman/default.htm). Exams are offered in:
    - Communication in Technical English
    - English for Business Communication
    - English for Office Skills
    - ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)
    - ESOL for Young Learners
    - Spoken ESOL
    - Spoken ESOL for Young Learners
  - IELTS (International English Language Testing System), administered jointly by UCLES (see above), the British Council, and IDP Education, Australia (http://www.ielts.org).

    IELTS scores (on a 0–9 band) are used especially by British and Australian universities to gauge the level of would-be students or trainers/teachers. There are papers in listening and speaking. Candidates then choose general or academic writing, and general or academic reading.
  - Diploma in English for International Communication is offered by the Institute of Linguists, London (http://www.iol.org.uk) for anyone who has reached a degree-equivalent level of attainment and does not have English as their first language.
  - SESOL (Spoken English for Speakers of Other Languages) offered by Trinity College London (www.trinitycollege.co.uk). These are one-to-one interviews with an examiner at a level to suit the candidate.

  - TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is offered by Educational Testing Services, New Jersey, USA (http://www.toefl.org).
    TOEFL scores are used by colleges and universities in North America and elsewhere to measure English proficiency for would-be students. The tests are now computer-administered in parts of the world where this is possible.
  - TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) is offered by TOEIC Service International, Princeton, New Jersey, USA (http://www.toeic.com).
    TOEIC scores are used by a number of companies in the USA and elsewhere to judge the level of English of potential employees.
  - Exams for Business are offered by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (see above) and by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) (http://www.lccieb.org.uk/qualifications.htm).

- **Testing in general**

  The best and most accessible books on testing are still A Hughes (1989) and C Weir (1993). See also J C Alderson et al. (1995).

- **Cloze procedures**

  A Hughes (1989: 67–70) repeats his earlier claims that cloze passages taken from real conversation transcripts can be good predictors of oral ability.

- **Oral testing**

  B Knight (1992) describes a fascinating workshop in which teachers investigate how to measure students' speaking skills.

- **Using rating scales**

  J Upshur and C Turner (1995) suggest replacing descriptive rating scales with scales where test markers have to answer a series of binary (yes/no) questions about student performance.

24

Learner automony, teacher development

A The autonomous learner

However good a teacher may be, students will never learn a language – or anything else – unless they aim to learn outside as well as during class time. This is because language is too complex and varied for there to be enough time for students to learn all they need to in a classroom. Even if students have three English lessons a week, it will take a great number of weeks before they have had the kind of exposure and opportunities for use which are necessary for real progress. As David Nunan suggests, not everything can be taught in class (Nunan 1988a: 3), but even if it could a teacher will not always be around if and when students wish to use the language in real life (Cotterall 1995: 220).

To compensate for the limits of classroom time and to counter the passivity that is an enemy of true learning, students need to develop their own learning strategies, so that as far as possible they become autonomous learners. This does not always happen automatically. Attitudes to self-directed learning are frequently conditioned by the educational culture in which students have studied or are studying (see Chapter 6, B1, and A2 below); autonomy of action is not always considered a desirable characteristic in such contexts. Teachers sometimes, as a result, encounter either passive or active resistance if they attempt to impose self-directed learning inappropriately.

Even where there is no resistance to self-directed learning, some students will be more successful than others as autonomous learners because of their learning style(s) (see Chapter 3, B3). Icy Lee points out that some of her students responded well to work in this area after they had signed a 'learner contract' with their teacher, but that others were not nearly so successful (Lee 1998). The more enthusiastic of her learners spent more time learning 'on their own', and felt more positive about themselves and about learning both during and after a term in which self-directed learning had been actively promoted by their teacher. They were confident that they would continue learning on their own after the course. The less enthusiastic learners, however, suffered from low self-esteem, had an ambivalent attitude to learner autonomy and spent less time in self study than their peers. They were unlikely to continue studying on their own after the course had finished.

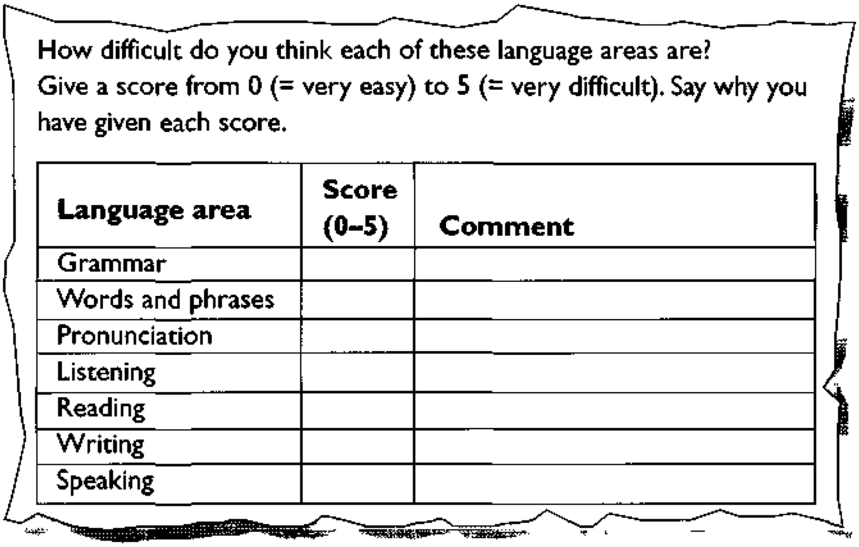
Despite such variation, however, there are various ways that we can help students to become autonomous learners, both during language courses and then for continuing learning when such courses have finished.

A1 Routes to autonomy

Teachers can promote autonomous learning in a number of ways:

- **Learner training:** in the classroom we can help students to reflect on the way they learn, give them strategies for dealing with different kinds of activities and problems and offer them different learning-style alternatives to choose from.

  Reflection helps students to think about their own strengths and weaknesses with a view to making a plan for future action. Thus, for example, we might ask students to complete a questionnaire in which they profile their feelings about aspects of language:



How difficult do you think each of these language areas are?
Give a score from 0 (= very easy) to 5 (= very difficult). Say why you have given each score.

Language area	**Score (0–5)**	**Comment**
Grammar		
Words and phrases		
Pronunciation		
Listening		
Reading		
Writing		
Speaking		

Personal language reflection

We can then probe the student's self-analysis in more detail, discussing with them issues such as why listening is difficult and what strategies they might adopt to deal with this (see Chapter 14, A4 and Chapter 16B). We can refer them to practice exercises for grammar or vocabulary and tell them where to find pronunciation practice or extra reading (see Chapter 15, A1).

Having students reflect privately on how they learn can be enhanced by frequent discussion of the learning experience. At certain times (such as at the end of every two weeks) students can be asked to describe their favourite lessons, and say which lessons or parts of lessons they found easiest or most difficult and why. They can discuss how and why they remember certain words and not others (they often remember ones they love or hate, or ones that they notice often and in different contexts) and what they might do to help them with the less memorable or difficult words (writing their own sentences, looking for them in anything they read, reading more, memorising lists). They can also be encouraged to evaluate their own progress (see Chapter 7, B2) by answering questions about how well they think they have learnt the material in the last few lessons.

We can have students reflect on the language itself: they can list the most difficult grammar they came across, or say what their favourite ten new words have been in the last fourteen days. We can give them opportunities to ask us specific questions about things they are having difficulty with.

Students can be given specific strategies for better learning. This may be given in the form of 'learning hints', such as these:

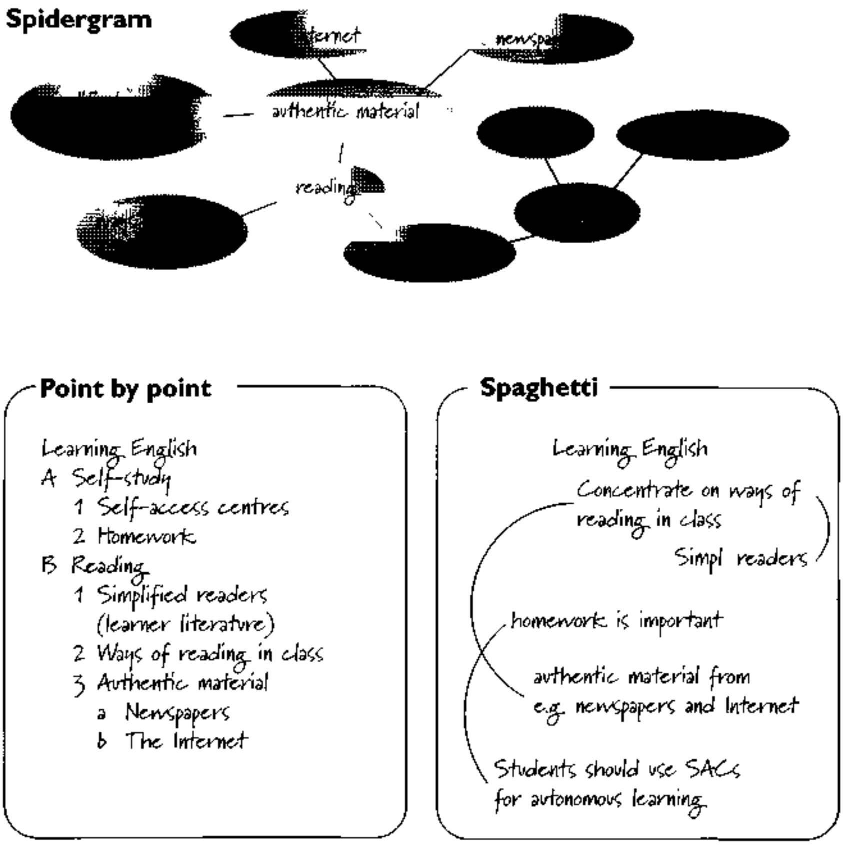
- **Make your own vocabulary notebook.**
- **List the words in the notebook alphabetically.**
- **For each word write an example sentence showing how the word is used, for example:**

library   *I went to the library and borrowed a book for two weeks.*

Vocabulary 'learning hints'

When training students to be better readers (see Chapter 15), we can encourage them not to worry about the meaning of every single word when they are reading for gist (see Chapter 14, A4). When training students in speaking, we can give them exponents for turn-taking (see Chapter 17, A2); for listening we can show them how to recognise the meaning of various intonation patterns.

When training students in writing skills (see Chapter 18B) we may want to train them in effective note-taking or composition planning. However, we need to be cautious about the way we do this. Rather than attempting to impose our own habits on students, we might instead offer them three alternatives (as in the example below) as a stimulus for discussion and as prompts for their own future note-taking methods:


Spidergram
ternet
newspa
authentic material
reading
Point by point
Learning English
A Self-study
1 Self-access centres
2 Homework
B Reading
1 Simplified readers (learner literature)
2 Ways of reading in class
3 Authentic material
a Newspapers
b The Internet
Spaghetti
Learning English
Concentrate on ways of reading in class
Simpl readers
homework is important
authentic material from e.g. newspapers and Internet
Students should use SACs for autonomous learning

Three possible note-taking techniques

- **Homework:** learner autonomy gets a powerful boost the first time that homework is set for students to do out of class. They will now have to study without the help of a teacher.

  Homework is not easy for teacher or students to get right. In the first place a decision has to be made about how much homework to set. Many school and college students have a number of different subjects to contend with, and English homework sometimes gets put to the bottom of the pile. When students are adults working in full-time jobs, the demands of self study may have to fight it out with work, family responsibilities, and other pursuits and hobbies.

  In order to get the level just right, teachers need to discuss with students how much homework they can cope with, given the other commitments they have. If there is class agreement between students and teacher about what is reasonable, there is a much greater chance of compliance (see Chapter 9, B1 for agreement on a general code of conduct).

  Homework is frequently seen as a necessary evil rather than as an important contribution to learner autonomy. The teacher Lesley Painter noticed that when she set homework tasks she looked at her students and noticed their 'glazed expressions' (Painter 1999: 42). Her students did the homework, but it bored them. They were not engaged by it and neither was she. Her response was to think how she might make homework 'more relevant to their personal and language-learning needs'. She constructed a homework questionnaire which students could administer to each other and to students in other classes. In the questionnaire respondents were asked what type of homework they were normally given, whether they ever skipped homework and why, and what homework they would find most useful. They were then asked to dream up a fun activity which both they and their classmates would find useful.

The result of this questionnaire was that the nature of homework tasks started to change dramatically. They now included scanning English language newspapers to report back on stories they found, writing film reviews, collecting real-life language examples, presenting English language songs to their classmates, or researching a topic for a future written or spoken performance.

None of these activities are particularly new, but, as Painter suggests, they are student-driven and, as a result, command much greater student engagement. As with all successful moves to encourage greater student autonomy, teacher and students together arrived at techniques and exercises which best suited the students themselves. Homework tasks become more like personal schemes of study, relevant, interesting, and useful.

- **Keeping 'learning journals':** many teachers ask students to keep journals or diaries of their learning experiences, in the hope that their students will then reflect on their lessons, explore their successes and difficulties, and come to a greater understanding about learning and language.

  Journal writing can be entirely voluntary or the teacher can set aside time for writing (ten minutes at the end of every Friday). Students can be directed to either write about anything they want, to write about what they have learnt in their lessons (and how they feel about it) or to write entries using recently studied language.

  Once students have started keeping journals, the way we respond to them may determine whether or not they keep them up. We might first discuss with the students exactly what responses they can expect from us. For example, we might decide to comment on content only. This would have the advantage of opening up a dialogue about learning and related issues without worrying overmuch about correct language use. But we might also agree to offer language comment or make suggestions about how to improve.

  Some teachers write letters rather than have students keep journals. Mario Rinvolucri started a course by writing the same letter to all his students inviting them to write back to him about anything they wanted (Rinvolucri 1983, 1995). He then entered into a correspondence with some of the class, and because the communication was written and personal, he was able to address learning problems in a way that was easier than in face-to-face interactions, especially during a whole-class discussion.

There are some dangers to letter writing of this kind – and to journal keeping in general. We may want to keep a greater distance between ourselves and our students than letter writing, especially, seems designed to encourage. Responding to letters and journals also takes time. Yet the advantages of having students think about what they are doing outweighs the disadvantages in the eyes of many teachers.

The self-access centre (SAC)

A useful adjunct to classroom learning – or indeed alternative to it – is the **self-access** or **open learning centre**. In SACs students can work on their own (or in pairs and groups) with a range of material, from grammar reference and workbook-type tasks to cassette tapes and video excerpts. SACs may have large collections of learner literature (see Chapter 15, A1), dictionaries (see Chapter 12A), reading texts and listening materials. Increasingly, SACs are equipped with computers for reference and language activities, together with access to the Internet and the rich possibilities it provides (see Chapter 10F). Where possible, SACs are rooms divided into sections for different kinds of material, though it is also possible to put large amounts of self-access materials on a trolley that can be wheeled from class to class.

The idea of a self-access centre is that students should drop into it either as a regular part of the timetable or in their own spare time. Some students may not actually be following a regular course, but may have signed up to be allowed to use the SAC even though they are not in any English class. Once inside the room, learners will decide what work to do, find the right kind of material, and settle down to complete the learning task. However, in order for this procedure to work effectively, a number of things have to take place.

- **Classification systems:** nothing will de-motivate a student more than trying to work on something that is too easy or way outside their reach. Yet this is a distinct possibility unless there is a clear system of classification which details the type of material and the level it is designed for. Thus when students come into a SAC they should find it easy to know where listening material is kept, what kind of listening material there is, and what levels are available. Such classification information should be visually prominent, using colour coding and/or clear labelling. Students should also be able to consult a card index or database. Guidance will also be needed for students who wish to access the Internet so that they do not waste their time on fruitless searches and inappropriate web sites (see Chapter 10F).

- **Pathways:** once students have completed an exercise, they can be given suggestions about where to go next. The material they have been using can list other items on the same topic or comment that, for example, *Now you have done this scanning exercise, you might want to try R/6/2 which asks you to skim a text – another important reading skill.* The activity thus becomes the jumping-off point for students to follow pathways suggested by SAC designers (and written into the material itself).

SAC assistants and teachers have a major role to play in helping students to use the centres successfully and follow appropriate pathways. Students can be shown where things are, be helped with hardware and software problems, and directed down new pathways. In order to help students in this way teachers need to be fully aware of a centre's contents and benefits, and trained – through induction materials, specially designed SAC lessons, and staff seminars – to help students appropriately (O'Dell 1992).

Although the materials and/or the teacher may suggest pathways for users to follow, our eventual aim is that students should be able to design their own routes for maximum personal benefit.

- **Training students:** most students, left to their own devices in a self-access centre, will not know how to use the facility to its best advantage, however good the classification system is. A self-access centre is likely to look either boring or intimidating. To prevent this situation students need to be trained to use centres appropriately.

  Some teachers provide training in class, giving students clear tasks and then taking them directly to the SAC to have them complete these tasks. This can happen on a regular basis over a period of weeks, at the end of which time the students are thoroughly familiar with what is in the centre and how best to use it. Many teachers design quizzes to get students hunting around the centre, in the process finding out what it has to offer. Guy Aston took a slightly different approach; he told his students to explore the centre, trying out the machines and rummaging through the shelves, with a view to producing leaflets and notices to show other students how to use them. Thus one group wrote about a concordancing package and other computer-based programmes with advice on which items were the best; another group gave advice on the video material (Aston 1993). The need to make things clear for their colleagues meant that students spent more time than they might otherwise have done investigating the contents of the centre.

  Even though students have been trained to use a self-access centre, they will still benefit from the help that assistants and teachers can give them in the centre itself.

- **Making self-access centres appropriate for students:** one view of a SAC has a group of individual students sitting apart from each other in silence, working profitably and autonomously. Yet as Jeremy Jones points out: 'To make autonomy an undiluted educational objective in a culture where it has no traditional place is to be guilty at least of cultural insensitivity' (Jones 1995: 229). Working at Phnom Penh University in Cambodia, he was concerned to make SAC use appropriate to the styles of learning which his students found most comfortable. Clear evidence suggested that students enjoyed working collaboratively and so, instead of the usual individual seating spaces in many SACs, students could choose more 'coffee-table' places, designed specifically to have groups working together. There was a higher tolerance of noise than might be expected in some other places, and tasks were designed which specifically encouraged pair and group interaction.

Anyone setting up a SAC or designing material and tasks for use in it should think carefully about who is likely to use it and what patterns of use will be most culturally appropriate. One way of doing this is to set up a student advisory panel who take part in planning and evaluating the centre. Apart from guaranteeing the involvement of those particular students, this has the potential for a SAC design which really meets the needs of its users.

- **Keeping interest going:** SACs really come into their own when students take the decision to go and study there by themselves – and continue to do so over a period of time. For this reason, administrators and teachers have to devise methods to keep users involved and interested.

  One way of doing this is to give students a feedback sheet to fill in after every activity. Though such forms are ostensibly for the centre's use the process of reflecting on an activity helps to maintain the user's engagement and prepares them for the next task.

  Another means of maintaining student involvement is through a SAC-users' committee which students can apply to become members of. With monthly meetings which bring about change and improvement, they have a genuine part to play in directing the centre's present and future course.

  An ideal way of keeping users 'on board' is for the centre to provide a monthly or quarterly newsletter and/or web site in which students and centre administrators list new material, and new ways of using things. Different pathways can be explored, and different users can be profiled. The newsletter/web site can run competitions and include the kind of news and gossip that newsletters in other fields use to keep their members involved.

After the course

At some stage in any student's learning life, they will find themselves studying on their own, either out of choice or because they cannot attend lessons or use a self-access centre. We need, therefore, to give them help and advice about how to continue with their learning when they have stopped attending our lessons.

- **Staying in touch with the language:** for those students who wish to continue learning the most important thing we can tell them is that they should stay in contact with English. They can do this by finding an English language TV or radio channel, by watching English language films, especially those with subtitles (see Chapter 20, C2), by listening to pop songs (especially if they can get hold of the lyrics), or by reading English language newspapers, magazines, and novels. Students should also use the various sources of learner literature (see Chapter 15, A1), reading and rereading as many books at their level of proficiency as possible. Students can also be encouraged to use the Internet for learner sites (see Chapter 10F) or as a varied general English language resource. They can also sign up for Internet-based courses (see, for example, the sites listed at the end of Chapter 21).

- **Training students to continue learning:** much of the advice that students are given about continued learning is not taken up (Braymen 1995). It is too general and though students know it is all sound counsel, they cannot follow the advice because the whole idea is too 'big', too amorphous. We need, therefore, to offer specific guidance which will allow them to focus on exactly what suits them best.

  The first thing we need to do is to include 'continuing learning' as a topic in the syllabus. We can involve students in awareness-raising activities; together we can list all available sources of English before discussing which are most appropriate for their individual needs and how and where to get hold of them. We can consider the various skills that the students might want to work on (see Chapters 14–19), and revisit various styles of language study (Chapter 11) and language research (Chapter 12) which they can usefully carry out on their own.

  To train students in ways of using resources at their disposal, we can organise 'self-study' projects. We might direct them to watch an English language news channel (or video) and note down the main story headlines before following up those stories in newspapers or on the Internet under our guidance. At the beginning we can provide the material on tape, but later students can start accessing news material on their own, using the techniques we have practised earlier.

  We can get students to use classroom techniques on their own, encouraging them to predict the content of texts before they read in detail, and then decide on a maximum of ten unknown words to look up in their dictionaries after they have read (see Chapter 15, A3). We can train them to be their own language researchers by looking for new words and patterns that they have come across in subsequent texts.

- **Personal plans:** we can negotiate personal study plans for future use based on our students' individual needs. Thus we might have them complete 'work cards'. The following example is for a learner at intermediate level who works in an office where the British magazine *The Economist* is available, who has their own learner dictionary (see Chapter 12A), and who has a copy of the vocabulary book *English Vocabulary in Use* (McCarthy and O'Dell 1994):

Aim: to improve my vocabulary

Tasks:

1 Read at least three magazine articles from 'The Economist' every week For each article note down three words I want to know the meaning of Look the word up in my dictionary Find the words again in next week's articles and check (with the dictionary) that they mean the same in the new articles
2 Do one unit from 'English Vocabulary in Use' every week and check with the answer key and my dictionary

If we do not have time for this, we can offer general work plans for anybody and everybody in which we list, for example, three good techniques for maintaining listening ability (and where to find listening material), or give details of Internet sites for language learners.

- **Staying in touch:** we can encourage students to stay in touch with each other after the course either by letter, e-mail, or through meeting up with each other from time to time. That way they can consult each other about problems, talk about the best magazines or books to read, share the most enjoyable web sites, or tell each other the best places to find English speakers to talk to.

The developing teacher

A potential danger for many teachers is that though each year or term brings us new groups of students with challenging individual personalities and distinct group dynamics, it is sometimes difficult to maintain a sense of excitement and engagement with the business of teaching. The constant repetition of lesson routines, the revisiting of texts and activities with student reactions that become increasingly predictable, can – if we do not take steps to prevent it – dent even the most ardent initial enthusiasm.

Perhaps what we are talking about is the difference between teachers 'with twenty years' experience and those with one year's experience repeated twenty times' (Ur 1996: 317). Teachers who seek to develop themselves and their practice – despite, or because of, their 'twenty years' experience' – will benefit both their students and themselves far more than those who, by constant and unthinking repetition, gradually become less and less engaged with the task of language teaching. Development may be a move from 'unconscious incompetence' (where we are unaware that we are doing something badly) to 'unconscious competence' (where we do something well without having to think about it). In order for this to happen we have to become aware of our incompetence (conscious incompetence) and know that we have made it better (conscious competence) (Underhill 1992: 76).

Development may be brought about by breaking our own teaching rules or norms as a way of challenging what we have taken for granted (Fanselow 1987). It may involve trying out new ideas or changing the ways we use old ones. It may involve investigating something that puzzles us or that we do not know about. But in all these cases our intention is not only to improve our own performance, but also to learn more about teaching and about ourselves.

Many teachers transform their professional lives by entering in-service training programmes, by studying for higher teaching qualifications, or by getting a place on a postgraduate course such as an MA in Applied Linguistics or TESOL. Such training not only offers chances for promotion, but also adds to our knowledge of issues which a heavy teaching timetable often makes it difficult to consider. Apart from such formal training, however, there is a great deal we can do to ensure that we continue to develop and grow.

Action research

Action research is the name given to a series of procedures teachers can engage in, either because they wish to improve aspects of their teaching, or because they wish to evaluate the success and/or appropriacy of certain activities and procedures. Julian Edge describes a process where a teacher, feeling unhappy about what she is doing, sets out on her own course of action to see how she might change things for the better (Edge 1999). The teacher is worried about the kind of feedback she gives in distance-learning courses. She feels her criticisms often seem very negative. She does some reading on the subject of feedback and then sends out her conclusions to students and colleagues for their opinions on her conclusions. Once she has synthesised all these opinions she issues her criteria for giving feedback. Her students are then asked to grade her feedback according to these criteria. She tries giving spoken feedback on cassette and finds that student response is very favourable. However, one student points out that written notes were much easier to refer back to later. The teacher then talks to her colleagues about what has happened so far. Some of them decide to try taped oral feedback; some decide to remain with written feedback. The teacher then writes up the whole process as an article for a teachers' magazine. The point of this description is that, like much action research, theory comes out of experience rather than experience being dependent upon theory.

The teacher described by Julian Edge is following a version of the classic action research sequence in which teachers first consider problems or issues in their teaching which lead them to design questions (or use other methods) in order to collect data. Having collected the data they analyse the results, and it is on the basis of these results that they decide what to do next. They may then subject this new decision to the same examination that the original issue generated (this possibility is reflected by the broken line in Figure 27). Alternatively, having resolved one issue they may focus on a different problem and start the process afresh for that issue.

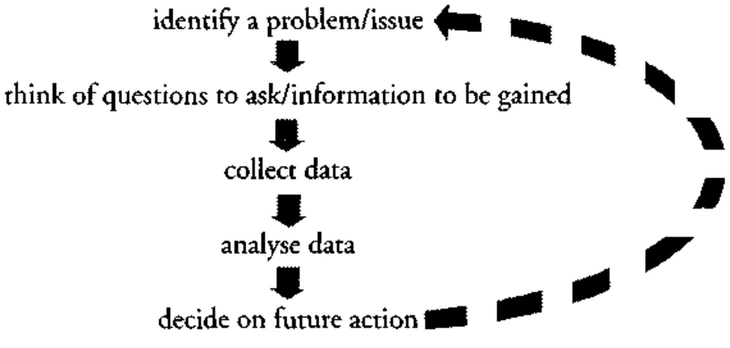


FIGURE 27: An action research cycle

- **Aims:** there are many possible reasons for conducting our own action research. We may want to know more about our learners and what they find motivating and challenging. We might want to learn more about ourselves as teachers – how effective we are, how we look to our students, how we would look to ourselves if we were observing our own teaching. We might want to gauge the interest generated by certain topics, or judge the effectiveness of certain activity types. We might want to see if an activity would work better done in groups rather than pairs, or investigate whether reading is more effective with or without pre-teaching vocabulary.

It is a good idea to think carefully about what our aim is before we embark upon research. Although general observation on its own often yields results, identifying a specific aim is far more effective in terms of deciding how to collect the data we need.

- **Methods:** there are a number of different methods for collecting the data we need:

KEEPING A JOURNAL: many teachers keep a record of what they and their students do in the form of a journal or diary. This encourages them to reflect upon their practice, and allows them to compare different reactions and re-evaluate the predictions that were made based on what actually happened.

OBSERVATION TASKS: we can record who speaks when in class, how many times each individual student asks for the teacher's help over a week's study, who chooses to sit with whom in freely-chosen pairs, or count how many times certain specific items of language are used. We can watch and make written records of student language production in general.

If we set ourselves tasks such as these, the data we collect will often be more reliable than more general reflection such as journal keeping. Everything will depend on identifying our aims and choosing the most appropriate methods for the data we think we need.

Videotape and audiotape are especially useful for precise observation tasks since they allow us to watch and/or listen to events repeatedly. If we have taped one group working over a period of time, we have the opportunity to identify exactly who says what and how the members of a group interact with each other. If a class is filmed as they respond to an activity we have a chance to measure their reactions objectively. Video filming also allows us to watch ourselves (see Chapter 20, D6); where we decide to change something for the sake of variety (see Chapter 22A and B4), the videotape helps us to gauge the effects of the change. Audiotape can be used in this way too, though without the visual element it is often less easy to use.

INTERVIEWS: we can interview students and colleagues about activities, materials, techniques and procedures. However, a lot will depend upon the manner and content of such interviews. When we discuss something with the whole class, for example, the results we get will be unreliable since not all students are prepared to offer an opinion, especially if it runs counter to a perceived majority opinion. Even with one-to-one interviews (if there is enough time for this), a lot will depend upon the questions we ask and how well we listen to the answers we are given.

An alternative to whole-class interviews is for teachers to ask students to discuss certain issues in small groups and then have group reporters give their conclusions back to the whole class.

Written questionnaires: these are often more effective than interviews, especially when administered to individual students. Questionnaires can get respondents to answer **open questions** such as *How did you feel about activity X?*, 'yes/no' questions such as *Did you find activity X easy?*, or questions which ask for some kind of rating response, for example:

Activity X was:
extremely easy ☐ easy ☐ quite easy ☐
difficult ☐ very difficult ☐ impossible ☐

We can also ask students to rate the qualities of an activity in order of importance or write a short paragraph about an activity, some material, or a unit.

Language progress: we can measure the students' language progress as a result of our new and different activities through homework assignments and test results.

Data collection frequently involves more than one method. Indeed the more methods we use, the more reliable our analysis is likely to be. By weighing up our journal entries, our observations, and our students' written responses, we will be in a good position to decide on future action.

B2 Professional literature

There is much to be learnt from the various methodology books, journals, and magazines produced for teachers of English. Books and articles written by teachers and theorists will often open our eyes to new possibilities. They may also form part of the action research or 'search' and 'research' cycles discussed above, either by raising an issue which we want to focus on, or by helping us to formulate the kinds of questions we wish to ask.

There are a number of different journals which cater for different tastes (see the list at the end of this chapter); whereas some report on academic research, others prefer to describe classroom activities in detail, often with personal comment from the writer. Some journals impose a formal style on their contributors, whereas others allow for a variety of approaches, including letters and short reports. Some journals are now published exclusively on the Internet, while others have Internet archives of past articles.

B3 Developing with colleagues

Not all reflection, action research, or reading needs to be done by teachers working alone. There are many ways teachers can confer with each other.

- **Cooperative/collaborative development:** teachers need chances to discuss what they are doing and what happens to them in class, so that they can examine their beliefs and feelings. However much we have reflected on our own experiences and practice, most of us find discussing our situation with others helps us to sort things out in our own mind. This has given rise to the concept of **cooperative development** (Edge 1992a, 1992b), where the role of the listener is crucial since 'the queen of facilitative skills is listening in a non-judgemental, respectful and empathetic way' (Underhill 1992: 79).

In cooperative development, **speakers** interact with **understanders**; a teacher, in this case, talks to an empathetic colleague. The empathetic colleague (the understander) makes every effort to understand the speaker but crucially, in Edge's realisation, does not interpret, explain, or judge what he or she is hearing. All that is necessary is for the understander to say 'this is what I'm hearing. This is what I've understood. Have I got it right?' (Edge 1992a: 65).

This style of empathising is similar to 'co-counselling', where two people agree to meet, and divide the allotted time in half so that each is a speaker and listener for an equal time period (Head and Taylor 1996: 143–144).

Charles Lansley, while sympathetic to the idea of empathetic colleagues, suggests that just listening does not change anything (Lansley 1994) and that 'phatic communion' may even reinforce the opinions that the speaker started with. People do not progress, he suggests, just by having good listeners agree with them all the time. What is needed is collaborative development, a sympathetic but critical discourse where colleagues challenge what each other says, tease out exactly what they mean, and subject their beliefs to careful scrutiny.

- **Peer teaching, peer observation:** in our teaching lives we are frequently observed by others. It starts on teacher training courses and goes on when academic coordinators, directors of study, or inspectors come into our class as part of some quality control exercise. In all these situations the observed teacher is at a disadvantage since the observers – however sympathetically they carry out their function – have power over the teacher's future career.

  Peer observation and peer teaching, on the other hand, involve colleagues – who are equal – watching and teaching together so that both may be helped in their understanding and practice.

  There are various forms of peer teaching. In the first, two teachers hold a dialogue in front of the class about a language point, a text, or an aspect of culture. Students gain from hearing different views on the same topic, and the participating teachers learn through their public interaction with each other. Sometimes two teachers can take different parts of the same lesson so that at one stage one might be acting as organiser and then observer, while the other plays the roles of prompter, and resource (see Chapter 4B). At other points in the lesson one teacher could explain a grammar point before the other takes over to run a short controlled practice session.

  A more formal way of organising peer teaching and observation is for two teachers to plan a lesson which one of them then teaches. After the lesson they both describe what happened to their joint plan and detail their experiences of the lesson. They can then discuss how it could be improved. For the next class the position is reversed.

As teachers most of us are understandably nervous about having other people observing our lessons. However, when we work with peers this nervousness is dissipated, and the result of our collaboration helps each participant to develop as teachers and as people.

- **The teachers' group:** one of the most supportive environments for teachers, where real teacher development can take place, is the small teachers' group. In this situation colleagues, usually working in the same school, meet together to discuss any issues and problems which may arise in the course of their teaching.

  Some teacher development meetings of this kind are organised by principals and directors of study. Outside speakers and animators are occasionally brought in to facilitate discussions. The director of studies may select a topic – in conjunction with the teachers – and then ask a member of staff to lead a session. What emerges is something halfway between bottom–up teacher development and top–down in-service teacher training (INSETT). At their best, such regular meetings are extremely stimulating and insightful. In many schools an INSETT coordinator is appointed to arrange a teacher development programme. Where this is done effectively, he or she will consult widely with colleagues to see what they would most like to work on and with.

  A popular alternative is where a group of teachers takes the decision to meet once a week and runs what is, in effect, its own support group (Plumb 1994). Any member of the group can suggest topics for future meetings; topics can range far and wide, from new ideas for pronunciation teaching to how to react when students make complaints, from the most appropriate kind of clothes to wear for teaching to five new uses for the video camera. The point of this kind of peer development is that teachers themselves are in charge of it, and as such are best placed to identify areas for development which are most relevant to them.

- **Teachers' associations:** there are many teachers' associations around the world. Some of them are international such as IATEFL based in Britain and TESOL, based in the USA; some are country-based such as JALT (in Japan), FAAPI (in Argentina), ELICOS (in Australia) or ATECR (in the Czech Republic); still others are smaller and regional such as APIGA (in Galicia, Spain), or BELTA (in Bournemouth, England).

  Teachers' associations provide two possible development opportunities:

CONFERENCES: attending conferences, meetings, and workshops allows us to hear about the latest developments in the field, take part in investigative workshops, and enter into debates about current issues in theory and practice. We can 'network' with other members of the TEFL community, and best of all we learn that other people from different places, different countries and systems even, share similar problems and are themselves searching for solutions.

PRESENTING: submitting a paper or a workshop for a teachers' association meeting, whether regional, national, or international, is one of the most powerful catalysts for reflecting upon our practice. When we try and work out exactly what we want to say and the best way of doing it we are forcing ourselves to assess what we do. The challenge of a future audience sharpens our perceptions.

Some teachers get very nervous about presenting, yet audiences of their peers are on the whole overwhelmingly supportive and friendly. Teachers who present to them, work with them, or lead discussions usually find their self-esteem enhanced, their beliefs challenged and expanded, and their possibilities for the future expanded.

- **The virtual community:** there are now a large number of channels on the Internet by which teachers can 'talk' to each other, exchanging ideas and opinions, and asking for help. Some of these, like TESL-L are extremely large, with daily postings of anywhere between fifteen and thirty submissions. Some of them, on various more or less formal sites, are smaller. Many language departments, institutes, and schools operate their own teacher-talk sites for people to visit and exchange information.

  Teachers who work on their own or feel isolated can enter into interesting discussions on these sites. In particular, they can post questions (asking for information about books, places, techniques, etc.) which someone will probably be able to answer.

  Communication via the Internet will, hopefully, never replace face-to-face encounters; it cannot really emulate cooperative and/or collaborative development or peer teaching, for example. But in subscribing to some teachers' mailing lists, we can keep ourselves in touch with a larger teacher community, so that the information we find there, and the 'discussions' we enter into, can all feed into our continuing development.

4 A broader view of development

In order to enhance professional and personal growth, teachers sometimes need to step outside the world of the classroom where the concentration, all too frequently, is on knowledge and skill alone. There are other issues and practices which can be of immense help in making their professional understanding more profound and their working reality more rewarding, such as:

- **Learning by learning:** one of the best ways of reflecting upon our teaching practice is to become learners ourselves so that our view of the learning–teaching process is not always influenced from one side of that relationship. By voluntarily submitting ourselves to a new learning experience especially (but not only) if this involves us in learning a new language, our view of our students' experience can be changed. We might suddenly find out how frightening it is to speak in class (Lowe 1987); perhaps we will realise that many 'communicative' activities are mundane, or realise how difficult it is to speak when we have nothing much to say (Ahrens 1993a); we might be surprised by how much we want to go through texts word for word (Gower 1999). It can be eye-opening to find out how important our teacher's approval is for us, how susceptible we are to teacher criticism, or to realise how important it is for the teacher to set us clear goals and guide us in other ways.

Those who teach a language which they themselves learnt as a foreign or second language will, of course, have highly relevant memories of the experience. Teachers who teach their first language will not have the same history. However, in both cases, continuing (or restarting) as a learner will offer significant insights into the whole business in which we are engaged as professionals.

- **Mind and body:** in his article 'Finding the centre' Alan Maley suggested that because teachers have stressful jobs, they need to pay attention to their physical well-being, not only so that they can teach better but also so that they can survive, learn, and grow as people (1993: 14).

  Teachers need to care for their bodies to counteract stress and fatigue. Katie Head and Pauline Taylor (1996: Chapter 6) suggest techniques for breathing and progressive relaxation. They advocate the use of disciplines such as Tai Chi, yoga, and the Alexander technique to achieve greater physical ease and counteract possible burnout.

  One of a teacher's chief physical attributes is the voice. Roz Comins observes that at least one in ten long-serving teachers need clinical help at some time in their career (1999: 8) to counteract vocal damage. Yet voice is part of the whole person, both physically and emotionally. When we misuse it, it will let us down. But when we care for it, it will help to keep us healthy and build our confidence. We can do this by breathing correctly, and resting our voice and ourselves when necessary. We can drink water or herbal tea rather than ordinary tea, coffee or cola if and when we suffer from laryngitis; we can adjust our pitch and volume, and avoid shouting and whispering.

- **Supplementing teaching:** one way of countering the potential sameness of a teacher's life is to increase our range of occupations and interests, so that teaching becomes the fixed centre in a more varied and interesting professional life.

  There are many tasks that make a valuable contribution to the teaching and learning of English. First among these is writing materials – whether these are one-off activities, longer units, or whole books. Materials writing can be challenging and stimulating, and when done in tandem with teaching can provide us with powerful insights, so that both the writing and the teaching become significantly more involving and enjoyable.

  It is not just materials writing that matters here, however. There are other things of equal potential interest. Some people write items for public exams. Some make tapes or set up web sites. Some help to organise entertainments for their students or run drama groups, sports teams, or conversation get-togethers. But whatever the tasks are, the positive effects of them can be felt in all aspects of our professional lives.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Learner training and learner autonomy**

  See A Scharle and A Szabo (2000). The most often cited work in this area – and still one of the best – is G Ellis and B Sinclair (1989) which expounds a theory of learner training and then provides a range of activities for preparation and skills training. See also K Bertoldi et al. (1988) which describes a three-stage process from awareness to action, and L Dickinson (1987). M Geldicke (2000) describes how she gives learners 'action plans' to guide their learning and S Cotterall (1995) discusses course design principles for promoting learner autonomy.

- **Student journal writing**

  See L Lonon Blanton (1987) and K Richards (1992).

- **Classification systems in self-access centres**

  See L Barnett and G Jordan (1991) for a description an early database.

- **Pathways in self-access centres**

  See C Gierse (1993) and L Barnett and G Jordan (1991).

- **Learning outside the classroom**

  Two articles which are well worth reading are N Braymen (1995) and N Pickard (1996).

- **The developing teacher**

  On teacher development see especially the excellent K Head and P Taylor (1996), S Bax (1995), J Edge and K Richards (1993), D Nunan (1989b) and A Underhill (1991). IATEFL (see below) has a special interest group (SIG) devoted to teacher development which publishes its own newsletter.

- **Reflective teaching**

  The best all-round book on the subject that I know is M Wallace (1998).

- **Keeping journals**

  The most impressive published teacher journal is J Appel (1995) – a whole book of reflections on his teaching experiences.

  On journals as training tools, see J McDonough (1994). S Hundelby and S Breet (1988) used journals as a kind of self-generated methodology book when giving Chinese teachers language improvement courses. See also J Jarvis (1992), S Thornbury (1991b), H Woodfield and E Lazarus (1998).

- **Observation tasks**

  D Kurtoglu Eken (1999) suggests having students themselves perform observation tasks as a way of collecting lesson data.

- **Peer teaching**

  See W Assinder (1991) and D Britten (1991).

- **Teacher development groups**

  K Head and P Taylor (1996: Chapter 5) describe different kinds of/experiences with teacher development groups.

- **Voice**

  See A Maley (2000), R Comins (1999), and R Whitehead in K Head and P Taylor (1996: 137–139).

- **Teachers' associations**

  Two of the major international teachers' associations (whose web sites have links to other associations) are:

  - (IATEFL) The International Association of Teachers of English as a foreign language, 3 Kingsdown Chambers, Kingsdown Park, Tankerton, Whitstable, Kent CT5 2DJ, UK (http://www.iatefl.org/)
  - (TESOL) Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 1600 Cameron Street, Suite 300, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, USA (http://www.tesol.edu/)

- **Journals for teachers** Some of the more useful journals for teachers are:

  - *English Language Teaching Journal (ELTJ)*, published jointly by the British Council and Oxford University Press. (http://www.eltj.oupjournals.org/) – articles are both practical and research-based and cover the full range of topics to do with language, methodology, class management, and theory. Niche Publications (http://www.niche-publications.co.uk/) supply a CD-ROM with all the articles from 1981–1998.
  - *Modern English Teacher (MET)* published by Pearson Education Ltd – a variety of articles with classroom ideas, current issues, 'about language', tips and hints for individual activities, and book reviews (http://www.onlineMET.com/).
  - *English Teaching Professional (ETP)* published by First Person Publishing – a practical magazine with articles on background theory, classroom activities, teacher development, etc. (http://www.etprofessional.com/)

- **Online journals, newsletters, ELT mailing lists and other teacher sites**

  There are too many teacher sites on the Internet to list here. Instead, teachers may want to go to some of the 'gateway' sites which offer links of all sorts for teachers. At the time of writing two of the best links sites are:

  - David Eastment's links page at http://www.eastment.com/links.html/
  - The Internet TESL Journal's links page – one of the biggest around – at http://www.aitech.ac.jp/%7Eiteslj/links/